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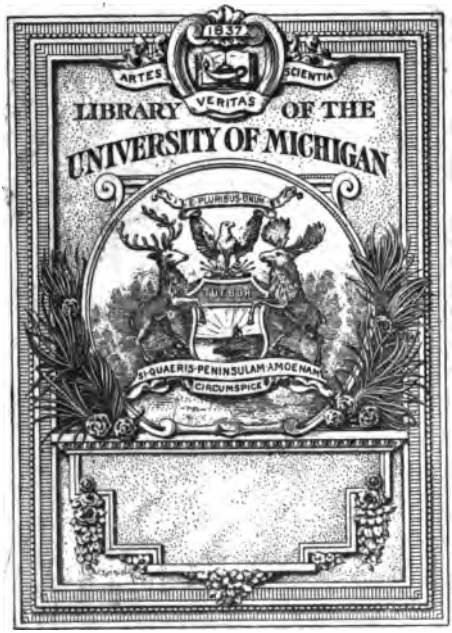
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GIVE UP YOUR GODS

Give Up Your Gods

A Drama in Three Acts
of Pagan and Christian Russia

By
Arthur Dougherty Rees
Author of the Poetic Dramas "The Double Love" "Columbus"
"William Tell"

Philadelphia
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1908

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A. D. REES

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THIS DRAMA
IS
DEDICATED
TO THE
HEROES, HEROINES, AND MARTYRS
OF
THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION
WHO HAVE STRIVEN SO NOBLY
TO COMPEL
THE ROMANOFF DYNASTY
TO
GIVE UP ITS GODS.

L39725

INTRODUCTION

Concerning the Russian Church, (Orthodox Greek,) Vladimir the Holy and this Drama.

One may say of the Russian Church, with more than mere figurative truth, that it remembered its Creator in the days of its youth, but has forgotten Him ever since.

The Muscovite variety of Christianity has had a trial of one thousand years, and yet what a fearful spectacle we behold these very hours in Holy Russia!

Catherine the Second, writing to Voltaire in 1763, just after she had gained the throne by her successful conspiracy against her husband which ended in his murder, said that "in the immensity of Russia a year is but a day, as are a thousand years before the Lord," and made that her excuse to the "Old Man of the Alps," for not having reformed Russia as much as she had at first dreamed of doing. Some apologist for the Russian Church, finding no other mode for its reconciliation before God and man, might quote Queen Catherine's phrase and lay the blame of its pitiful failure also, upon such abstractions as Space and Time. There would be no Laesa Majestas in that, no danger of exile, and the words could be spoken with great impressiveness.

In every niche and corner of the Immensity of Russia, her church has placed its jewelled ikons and holy images, which purport, for the comfort and peace of the general gender, to perform miracles,

win battles, destroy plagues and preserve life; it has dramatically performed for more than thirty generations its ritual of vestment, of incense and music, captivating the ignorant peasants with pomp, with fine and grand ceremonies, with the arts of superstition, with its alleged intimacy with a god who has made It the only True Church in Christendom; enslaving them with its distortion of the fifth commandment into: "Obey the Czar and pay your tax"; surrendering them as hostages to the forces of Darkness and Misery, and withal, preserving the sanctity of Autocracy, being paid therefor, and inspired thereto by the Beneficiaries on the Inside.

And what are the results of a thousand years of this and kindred things? Russia in the twentieth century of the Christian era overwhelmed as at no other period of her history with moral chaos, murder, disease and misery. By their fruits ye shall know them.

In the earlier days of the church, its prelates condemned accused persons to death without trial and in the days of this generation, it has shown the world evidence of its conspiracies for robbery and murder, particularly of the Jews.

The Russian church has always been exceedingly deficient in spiritual and intellectual elements. All western nations have had their great preachers, except Russia. About three hundred and fifty years ago, a monk, Sylvester, with courage in his heart, flung himself into the presence of Ivan the Terrible and proclaimed upon him for his cruelties, the judgment of God. If true priests of Christ had proclaimed that upon but one half the Russian monarchs,

there would be to-day in Russia considerably less of that pitiable misery which now infests the Holy Empire.

Sylvester went into exile and the Terrible Ivan went to his church and, kneeling before the Cross of Christ, named one by one and sometimes by families and groups, those whom he had slain, praying that, if he had not completed the work of their salvation in this world, God might recompense them for it in the next. Then he departed for new victims.

We still have memories of Father Gapon, but the roll of such priests or prelates is wofully short. With the exception of the Patriarch Nicon " in coarse and homely proportions a Russian Luther," who " saw that the time was come for giving life to the ceremonial observances and a moral direction to the devotional feelings of oriental worship," but who was degraded and condemned by the Russian ecclesiastics themselves (1667), there is no Bruno, no Savonarola, no Arnold of Brescia, no real Luther or Loyola, no Bossuet and no Chrysostom in Russia. The Protestant Reformation, like the Renaissance, shone only as a distant gleam over the western horizon of the Muscovite plains.

Not until Russia called herself Christian did she call her wars holy. In Greece, the church did not aim to rule the state, but in Russia it soon developed the tendency, only to become finally subjected to the state itself when Peter the Great abolished the patriarchate in 1721. Those who have been the true prophets, inspiring the people with the simple gospel of Christ, it has persecuted, excommunicated and damned.

Introduction

Truly must it be said that the church in Russia during its very first days, endeavored to do good. It tried to abolish polygamy, to banish certain pagan performances and the names of the older gods; it brought from the West into the gloomy dark ages of Russia, a new kind of music and singing, the first translations of the Bible, some measure of education and of Byzantine culture, to say nothing of its religious message and teachings. Then it became successful and succumbed to power, riches and corruption.

Tolstoi declares its greatest good is accomplished, —the knowledge of the life of Christ, which it has diffused,— therefore, he adds, "Let it depart." As a visible embodiment of the people's faith it will not depart—but will change. Toleration, Liberality, and Humanity will, it is hoped, make it some day a Christian Church. Pobiedonosteff is gone and his forms of Iniquity and Reaction have lost their most fanatical disciple.

There are many priests in it, some of whom are revolutionists, who are yearning for higher things; even councils have been called within the church itself that it might be purged. Its regeneration depends upon the gradual success of the revolution; upon its dissociation from the State and the Bureaucracy and the birth within it of some Holy Spirit, which like vestal fires, shall ever be kept burning.

No longer can its priests resort to a procession of holy images and crosses thru the streets and fields to quell riot and disorder; nor can Moscow fires now be extinguished by prayers, (even if they ever could,) nor plagues be obliterated by prostrations

before the jewelled ikons, for Time has wrought its changes tho the church has stood still. Overburdened with Falsity, Pride and Sin and Ignorance, it has been unable to move along the high ways of Life, and has damned those who have progressed, and those who have scorned to be Dead with it. Like Vladimir and his people of old, it must give up its gods to be redeemed.

* * * * * * * *

The influences at work in creating a new religion for Russia were many and various. On the whole, however, it must be said that the change was for the most part a "Great Man Movement," in that its economic antecedents were not so powerful as were the causes of it that lay in Vladimir himself, without whom Paganism would have held sway much longer in Russia.

He, being in reality a Northman was influenced by the difference in the environment of flat Russia and the mountainous north of his ancestors. That difference brought out greater discontent, greater desire for action and change. In addition, the sub-conscious influence of the Scandinavian Mythology made the appeal of the Russian gods and idols, strange and unsatisfying. The vicissitudes of his career as a conqueror increased his desire for some permanency in his faith, however crude; he wanted something to transform his life and finding it, he gave up his gods,—his idols and his sword.

The previous beginnings of Christianity in Russia, the proximity of Greece; the Dnieper River, by which, says one, Christianity entered the Empire,

and above all the position and power of Vladimir as a conqueror of Kief and as one who had firmly consolidated all his inheritances and conquests, aided in the transformation.

Vladimir wandered over the country with his sword and battle axe, like a reincarnation of Thor upon his expeditions armed with the mighty hammer. He so impressed himself upon his people that in the popular songs and legends of Kief, a strain of music at least eight centuries old, he is still the central heroic figure; not merely a man, but a kind of god himself, sent from Heaven to rule and enlighten his people and to be known in story as the "Beautiful Sun of Kief."

* * * * * * * *

I have followed only a minute portion of exact history in the drama, building it upon the bare story of Vladimir's conversion, his dispatch of his commissioners, their report and his action after his own baptism, when he became pious (and peaceful, except for self-defense) as he had formerly been barbarous and warlike.

I have not sought for rigid technical perfection in its construction, not considering that the highest excellence, but have striven to make a poetic, dramatic and psychological study of a barbarian king and his spiritual evolution, and of the transition of a people from their primitive religion to the first steps in Christianity, endeavoring however, to create a drama capable of stage production, after the necessary omissions are made.

A. D. R.

PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA,
July, 1908.

CHARACTERS REPRESENTED.

VLADIMIR, King of pagan Russia; a Northman by descent, the great-grandson of Rurik, one of the Northmen who conquered the primitive Slav land and became the first king in Russian history.
ROGNEDA, his wife.
BLUDE, BORIS } trusted officers in Vladimir's army.
ALOYSHA, a pagan seer.
KAYSAN, a wandering singer.
AKIM, a hunter.
ELENA, RESULKA, YAROSLAFNA } Kief maidens.
ILYA, a youth

Soldiers, populace, boys and girls, priests, commissioners, messengers, ghosts of Rogneda's father and brother.

GIVE UP YOUR GODS

ACT I

In an open field near Kief, Russia, where a knoll rises at the left, facing the east. The Dnieper river can be seen in the distance, like a long silver gleam at the background of the wide plains which almost entirely fill the scene. At the far right a lonely hut stands, bleak and mournful, in front of which are the mounds of two graves, lying parallel to each other. As the play opens several youths and maidens are frolicking about celebrating the advent of Spring according to their customs. Some of them are standing on the knoll, watching the sun rise.

The time is in the early morning on the first day of Spring in pagan Russia, about the year 987 A. D.

ELENA. (*From the hill-top.*)
The golden bell of heav'n hath tolled the hour
Of Spring! Our full hearts echo its sweet peal!
Then welcome to its glowing face that peers
From heav'n, from yonder east and from the ground!
We welcome thee, sweet Spring; come with thy joys;
O come with flax, deep roots, abundant corn!
I have but one love, and the sky one sun;
The cuckoo has one song, the year one spring!

RESULKA. (*Running up the hill-side.*)
Sweet Spring, ride in upon a plough, and make

The harrow be thy horse! O may thy gentle winds
Dig furrows in the fields while kissing them,
And sweet corn, yellowed by the fresh-gold sun
Shall grow the quicker and before thee too,
Shall bow the sooner, as I now bow down!

(She bows toward the Sun.)

YAROSLAFNA. *(Running up the hill.)*
Here is my aurochs horn; thru it I'll blow
As loud as Perun's thunder; hear!

(She blows her horn.)

ELENA. Stop, stop!
The cuckoos will be frightened off for fear
The winter's grumbling hath not gone.
RESUL. The rooks
And larks and swallows all are here; 'tis spring
Enough for them.
YAROS. The pike can send his tail
Up thru the ice with ease, so winter 's flown.

(Enter at the left several boys with bows, shooting arrows to the west and north. Some of them carry a figure, made of straw and hemp, symbolizing Death.)

ELENA. Shoot, boys, shoot, and pierce the cold and dark,
And drive them both away!

(The boys continue shooting.)

RESUL. Your arrows, boys,
Compete with sun beams, driving back the cold.

(One of the boys sets up the figure of Death on the hill-side and all gather around in front of it, whilst those with bows, shoot at it.)

BORIS. *(Running in from the left with his bow.)*

Hurrah, let's kill old Death to welcome Spring!
I'll draw my bow back to my ear and then
The cord will sing as soon 's the arrow flies
To pluck the dummy's wintry eyes out,
Just as a Polish raven would.

(Boris shoots and misses, whilst the others laugh at him.)

RESUL. Its eyes
Elude thy arrows as do falcon-wings!

BORIS. *(Running to the dummy.)*
I'll fling it higher than the standing woods
And little lower than the flying clouds
So that 'twill fall into the Dnieper's flood.

(He seizes it and carries it down amongst the others.)

ILYA. And with my cudgel of red-elm, I'll beat
The ragged symbol of the winter's death.

(He beats it.)

BORIS. Beat it like a fur coat.

(Ilya beats it again, whilst the others laugh and shout.)

RESUL. Let's hang it on
Some angled tower of alder wood to show
The people that old Winter's dead.

ILYA. It must
Be flung into the Dnieper's flood, or else
The gods will be incensed.

BORIS. No; 'tis not so!

(Ilya starts off with the dummy towards the river, and soon disappears in the background followed by Yaroslafna, Elena and the boys with bows and arrows.)

Well, let them go appease their gods! Resulka's hair

Is like a golden tassel in the sun.

RESUL. And Boris' tongue is like the silken rein
That guides the steed of flattery.

BORIS. My sweet
Resulka, hear,—the grey wolf leaves his haunt
To roam the open plain; black ravens fly
From nested oaks; the yellow antlered stag
Shines 'mongst the dark pines hunting for his mate,
And from the cypress flies the nightingale
To sing of love at latticed windows wide,
So spurn not my words that in sweet spring time
Fly forth love laden, hunting thy sweet lair!

RESUL. Ah, Boris, more than love hath come with Spring.
Brew no more honey on thy lips but hear:
The Prince of Novgorod in Kief camps.
Wild hearted is Vladimir,—for 'tis he.

BORIS. He who hath raced with winds upon the sea
And on the boisterous Baltic ruled?

RESUL. 'Tis he!

BORIS. O Kief thou art in the Northman's grasp Again!

RESUL. And Baltic pirates seize our soil!

BORIS. When sea-kings become land kings, then beware!

RESUL. They say he drinks the sea-foam, is it so?

BORIS. I do not know. But listen, if he takes
Me prisoner, to thwart Queen Olga's God—

RESUL. Boris,
Forsake Queen Olga's God, Perun hath struck
This blow on us for faithlessness to him.

BORIS. Resulka dear, believe in Olga's God.

Believe in Him; He giveth spring! Perun
Hath brought us woe.

RESUL. But hath protected us
For ages past, and yesterday there swept
A hurricane thru every street, where'er
The Cross was borne, whilst where Perun passed by,
But gentle winds abode.

BORIS. Resulka dear——

RESUL. O hark! they're coming back—look, here they are.

(Enter at the back on the left Ilya and those who left with him a moment before.)

ILYA. (*Waving his bough of greens.*)
Green grows the earth where spring's lips kiss the soil,
The wintry world's wounds now are dressed with grass,
And stars shine nightly in the sky as gleam
A bevy of white swans on the coal black sea!
The stormy winds have passed and carried off
Our sorrows, scattering them upon the open plains!

YAROS. The hungry river swallowed what we threw
To it.

ILYA. The dummy's in the watery tomb
And winter's gone again.

(They wave their greens and shout, as Kaysan enters at the left, carrying a harp.)

BORIS. Oho, a minstrel in a marten skin!
Come tune your harp and throw your sables off!

KAY. Good country folk hear plain speech first and then
I'll sing whate'er you wish.

ILYA. What is it, Kay?
KAY. Vladimir, from the north, swears at our gods
As powerless beings, then wonders at the Cross.
I'll stab him with a fish tooth stave, I will.
BORIS. O Kaysan, sing, Vladimir is——
RESUL. Boris, hush.
ILYA. Thou traitor, Boris!
BORIS. I am not. My land
Is not Vladimir's, nor my gods, his own.
KAY. The jewels that I'll weave with silken skeins
Into my foot gear,—they shall light my path
To where Vladimir's tent is, then my stave——
BORIS. Sing, Kaysan, sing; thy songs will stab our hearts,
So plan no more than that.
KAY. O for a whip
Of seven silks to scourge the infidel.
ILYA. Sing, Kaysan; celebrate the spring and let
The northern prince be scourged by Perun's mace!
YAROS. We've flung old Winter's rusty chain mail down
Upon the stones; its rust is shaken off,
And sparkling spring time shines on every link.

(All dance about Kaysan and shout amid the waving of the boughs and rejoicings. When Kaysan begins to sing, all keep silent.)

KAY. (*Singing in a monotone.*)
String after string of song, I'll touch and blend
Them into one, as streams meet in the flood
Of Mother Volga's endless waves.
RESUL. Good, good!
Sing of Mother Volga!

ELENA. Yes, Kaysan, sing
That old, old song of Volga's flood.
KAY. Then hear ye all! O from beneath the oak,
From willow bushes near the swamps and moss,
From forests dark and from the lofty hills,
From crimson elms, white curling beeches, flows
Forever southward thru the great white world,
Forever onward till the earth hath gone,
Our Mother Volga river to the sea!
In many bayed green curling lines she rolls!
And from beneath the white alatyr stone,*
She rises, rolls and flows into the sea!
Her flood is broad nearby Kasan;
But broader is it near to Astrakhan,
For many a tribute river in her flood
And many a brook within her bosom pours!
A mighty sweep wide thru the open plain
She makes nearby Dalinsky, and along
Where Smolensk's gloomy forests hide the bogs:
Within a bed of full three thousand versts
She sleeps and wakens, rolling to the sea.
Then in the Caspian's waves by seventy mouths,
She falls and sings in seventy tongues her song.
BORIS. Good! good!

(All shout for joy.)

RESUL. Dear Kaysan, sing it o'er again.
YAROS. Our darling Mother Volga knows 'tis spring!
KAY. O could her rolling waves change into dews,
Their tender drops, as from a mother's breast,

*Amber found along the Baltic Sea, anciently called by the Slavs, the Latyr Sea. Rivers were supposed to rise from beneath it.

Would nurture wintry steppes to life as doth
The spring time which ye sing.

RESUL. (*Embracing Kaysan.*) Dear singer, sing Again!

KAY. O give me now great Perun's mace
To strike the Prince of Novgorod, who rules
In Kief's royal halls and scorns our gods!

BORIS. Peace, Kaysan, peace. Vladimir is our King,
And rules by right.

(*All except Resulka, gather about Boris threateningly.*)

ILYA. Boris, thou art a traitor,—
Unto our land as well as to our gods.

BORIS. Stand back! Till Perun's mace can swing in air.
Boris shall stand where he stands now.

RESUL. Dost thou
Thus yield unto the Conqueror?

BORIS. Resulka,——
Fear nothing; there's a God ye know not of.

(*Sounds of bells and cymbals heard to the right. All look thither just as four horses haul in a huge sledge on which is a pillar and on the pillar a wheel, upon which sits a man dressed in a peculiar style, with bells and cymbals hanging about him. In his hand he holds a loaf of bread and bottle of spirituous liquors. Men and women enter behind, singing and shouting rather incoherently. All pass slowly to the left, whilst all except Resulka, gather around it and follow it.*)

ILYA. Hail to the sun's wheel and the god of festivals!

(*Shouts and rejoicings.*)

ELENA. The sun returns to earth!

YAROS. 'Tis spring indeed!

ILYA. Fauns, satyrs, sprites; demons of pine wood fire,
Come, follow us in worshipping the sun.

(All, except Resulka, pass out at the left.)

RESUL. The spring time's not entirely joy! My Boris,
Let me entreat thee once again! My gods
Be thine! O Boris, hear thy kindred call!
There weeps thy mother as a river runs;
There weeps thy sister as a streamlet flows;
And here I weep, as falls the tender dew!
O rise, dear Sun and gather up my tears,
Or straightway to the Dnieper shall I go,
And standing on its steep bank, throw my wreath
Upon the waters there and watch to see
Whether it sink or float, thus tell my fate.

(Enter at the left Vladimir in battle costume, followed by Blude and guard of two.)

BLUDE. (*Looking back to the left.*)
They're bringing Perun from the town, my king.
VLAD. Ah let them keep it in the town; 'tis there
That it belongs.
BLUDE. But they wish thee to pay
A public homage to their chief protector.
VLAD. I am their chief protector now. Yon town,
O'er whose grey domes of aspen wood, doth soar
The falcon prince of Novgorod, is mine,
All mine, but its mute gods.
BLUDE. Hush, hush!
VLAD. (*Flourishing his sword.*) Give me
Such deities that roar like northern seas;
That dig the vales and pile the mountains up;

Such gods who can confront the bellowing deep
Like those grim buttresses that make
Besieging waves recede and force
Their swift retreating billows to contend
For th' ocean's spaciousness, wherein, alarmed,
At but their own deep vortices, they cry
Aloud for truce, as if Thor's hammer hovered near!

BLUDE. Great King, take care,—thou must profess their gods.

VLAD. Their gods offend me and these plains beguile
My valor; I would heave them into hills
Whose peaks were mounds for every idol here.

BLUDE. Great King, thou art not king of gods yet, hence
Thou canst not trifle with them so.

VLAD. I am a king of seas and misty deeps;
The Baltic gave me tribute and is mine.
Its wildest winds could only curl my hair
And thus its frantic fingers crowned my brows.
E'en in the pauses of its sleepless surge,
Mute threatenings abode on its white tongues,
And tho that tireless and invulnerable sea,
Whose waters hurl their flanking phalanxes
Against the very mountains frowning brows,
Charged with its ceaseless torrents 'gainst my ships,
And rose on high to seek celestial aid,
Yet my mute bulwarks triumphed o'er their flood,
For I am one of Odin's wolves; my power
Is pillared 'mongst the silver sands of heav'n
Which ocean surges can not shift away.

BLUDE. And now thou art become a land king too.

VLAD. And shall be king of gods and hurl them down.

BLUDE. Not yet, great king; bow first to them thyself;
Such homage wins the confidence of all
And then thou'lt have more power to do thy will.

VLAD. I trust thee, Blude, for thou hast helped my cause.

BLUDE. Hark! here they come!

(Enter a group of men and women, led by Aloysha, dressed in a white blouse without a girdle. Some carry the idol Perun, whose head is of silver, beard of gold, trunk of hard wood and whose legs are iron. His hands hold a long wooden mace. The carriers set it down in front of the knoll, just as Boris, Ilya, Yaroslafna, Elena and Kaysan return, all carrying greens.)

ALOY. (*Standing before Perun.*) Hail, Perun, king of gods,
Whose motionless rod rules in our Russian world!

(All bow to Perun with Aloysha except Vladimir and Boris.)

ALOY. Great king, dost thou deny our god?

VLAD. I wish
To bow alone, for your god must behold
My tribute separate from all.

ALOY. Boris,
What meaneth thy refusal of a bow?

BORIS. Allegiance to a better god.

ALOY. Thou infidel!
May Perun's thunder strike thee dead!

KAY. September's spleen hath seized him.

RESUL. Boris, bow;
For my sake bow unto our god.

BORIS. I can't.

ALOY. As arrows make the damp oaks quiver,
So may Perun's mace strike fear in thy soul.
KAY. O Boris, hear! Perun can stand thy stare.
Go; worship near a sacred ring-bark oak,
Till Perun's flaming dart girds thee about
And thunders o'er thy head, but strikes thee not.
Then as thy further penance for this blasphemy,
Go, lie with thy head in a willow bush,
Thy feet in plume grass till the frozen streams
Are loosened from the winter's ashen hand,
And till small wood birds weave their nests within
Thy yellow curls.
VLAD. Boris, come here to me.

(As Boris does so, three armed men enter suddenly at the right.)

1st Man. The Cossacks of the Don!
2nd Man. Great king, they come!
The barbarians threaten us! They've crossed the Don
And will be on us soon! A mighty host
Is coming. O, their horses breath,
Breathed on the damp cold air was like a cloud
Of steam that hid the fair red sun!
1st Man. They'll plough
The spring soil with their Tartar spears!
VLAD. Peace, peace;
A few men do not make a host upon
The open plain, nor is but one dark tree
A pine wood forest.
2nd Man. They can hurl their spears
As if they were but feathers of the swan.
VLAD. Our quivers will beat a war song on our hips,
While shaggy steeds, curried with fish teeth combs,

Career so madly thru their lines, that they,
Like pebbles, will be tossed into the Turkish Sea,
Or have their stubborn skulls knocked so together
There'll be no soul left in them.

ALOY. May thy words
Be not mere pride's pretense. With Perun's help
We shall drive all barbarians back.

VLAD. My mace
Of steel is better worth than his.

ALOY. Great king,
Art thou blaspheming too?

VLAD. (*Drawing his sword.*) Away, away!
All of ye hence but Boris; take your god;
Transport him hence! He threatens with a mace
But can not walk; he stares with glowing eyes
But can not see; his golden beard is long
His wits are short; his legs are iron,
But his foundation 's sand; his voice is thunder,
But it commands no forces such as mine.
A paramount pretense! Take him away!
Heav'n is not subterfuge, nor is a god
A powerless potentate, not any more than words
Are bogs and fertile plains,—take him away!

(*Aloysha moves toward Vladimir threateningly; others follow.*)

BLUDE. Stand back! Stand back!

VLAD. (*To his guard.*) Stand ready by your king.

(*Guards prepare to defend Vladimir.*)

I say unto you take that thing away.

ALOY. Let us depart.

(*The carriers lift up Perun and bear him out at the left. All depart that way but Vladimir, Blude and Boris.*)

VLAD. And may they stay departed!
I am aweary of their gods; they are
As stupid as flat plains that girt me here.
I see them in the towns; yea, everywhere.
The great god of the North Sea is not seen,
But ah, the Deep is like a bondman unto him.
BORIS. My God's not seen but He is everywhere.
VLAD. What god is that, with such a world-wide scope?
BORIS. The greatest of all gods; the only God;
Whose son is Christ—He governs all things here.
VLAD. Can he control the seas and plant within
The frantic surge, a rocky promontory,
Against whose bastions, ocean's snow-white spears
Are hurled with no avail?
BORIS. He can, great king.
He makes the storms which make the seas rise up,
And makes the calm which quells tempestuous waves.
VLAD. Ah that's a god; a god who doeth things,
Not one that sitteth still on iron legs.
Tell me, where is he found?
BORIS. He is invisible.
VLAD. Like Odin?
BORIS. Greater than he and yet unseen.
VLAD. Then what's the use in searching after him?
BORIS. There is great use; the searching is the profit,
And finding, or cessation of the search,
Is self-delusion; He's no captive god,
That kings can sport with or adorn.
VLAD. Where didst
Thou learn of him?

BORIS. In Constantinople.
VLAD. I'll send my envoys there to learn of him;
I'll send them elsewhere too; the god of gods
Be mine! The god who's stronger still than I,
To whom, perforce, I must bow low in homage,
And he alone shall be my conqueror.
BORIS. A conquest which the conquered wins.
VLAD. I do not understand thee, Boris.
BORIS. When my God
Doth make a conquest He restores the spoils
Of victory unto the conquered one.
His ravages need no revenge.
VLAD. O let me sleep; your god may weary me.
Here by these two bare mounds I shall lie down,
So watch ye over me from yonder point.

(Points to the left beyond the scenes. Vladimir lies down in front of the mounds and sleeps. As Blude and Boris move to the left, Resulka enters that way; Blude passes out; Boris and Resulka face each other an instant.)

RESUL. Let me entreat thee for our fathers' gods!
O worship thou with me; do not forsake
Our gods that give the spring and mossy turf.
I am so grieved I wander everywhere;
In forests to my dark green oaks, but there
My sorrow cutteth like an axe and then
I wander in the open fields, but there
It cometh like a scythe to mow my heart.
I lie in leafy shades, yet sorrow there
Is as the parching sun upon the steppes,
And like a haggard witch that steals the dew.
It sits beside my pillow as I sleep,
And moans like pining cuckoos in my dreams.
O Boris, dear, soon I shall die of grief;

Be buried in a damp earth grave
That sorrow, like a spade, hath dug for me.
BORIS. Grief maketh a divining woman of thee;
Forethink no sadness; then alone twill come.
Thy gods are many, but our love is one.
My God is everywhere, thine here alone;
Forsake thine idols and thy grief shall go.
RESUL. O Boris, I am weary; what a world!
I sang of spring with winter in my heart.
BORIS. The springtime is the birth time; grow with me.
Do not be dead with idols; rise with spring.
Mute pilots made of sable woods but bear
The forest's darkness in their eyes; gold gleams
On Perun's beard are mimic lights;
His silver lustre is a bauble's lure,
A trinket's test of soul capacity.
His firm clasped mace he can not even wave,
But holdeth as an armoury wall doth hold
The rusted lances of an outworn age.
Thou wouldst not invocate that drear dumb thing
That thus dissembles mighty God himself
In man's mosaics, pieced with wood and gold?
O let it be a monument for death,—
For sanguine incantations and incessant hopes
That dash themselves to pieces on its ears.
Then thou canst mount unto the unseen God,
Upon this idol-stepping stone thus cast away.
RESUL. What idol wilt thou give when Perun's gone,
Who blesseth me so well and blesseth all?
He blesseth ploughs and furrows, corn and grass
That riseth rich as rushes near the streams;

He driveth hail clouds from the moors
And dowers thriving crops with shine and rain.
His mace,—it need not move, yet ruleth all
This great white world beyond the coal black sea.

BORIS. What can I give thee but the living God
Whose Heav'n and Earth appeared upon a thought?
If thou demandest idols, take them both,
Instead of that dumb fraction of the whole,
Transported from the Asian wilds.
Why worship such mere patches, mute and dead,
Or gird thyself with straw belts, torn too soon?
O love the God that loveth thee as I!

RESUL. Can I forsake thee, Perun, god of old
And like the wandering falcon, have no nest?

BORIS. Resulka make thy nest with me.

(Blude enters suddenly from the left.)

BLUDE. And still
He sleeps.

BORIS. Yes.

BLUDE. Both of you come with me then.

(Blude, Boris and Resulka go out at the left. As they do so the ghosts of Rogneda's father and brother, murdered by Vladimir, arise from the mounds, and, brandishing weapons, hover over the king, when he suddenly awakens.)

VLAD. The night's pale, spectral tresses, glistening
Like arctic lights, crowd round me here—nay, ye are ghosts,
Thin demons that would scourge my fearless soul.
Begone; sink with your ill importing visages
Into those earthen cells.
(*Pause.*) What! ye will not?

Then brandish your pale weapons as ye will
Or plant them on yon mounds and then kneel down
Unto such war gods to invoke their aid
To help thee take my life. Hence, phantoms, hence!
I fear nor ye nor any ghosts. Shall I,
Who hath confronted ocean's hugest waves
That made my barge quake with their heavy charge;
Who conquered Novgorod and Kief too,
Whose step plants vales within these plains and thus
Makes mountains where none were before, recoil
From demons, famished for revenge, that spring
Out of my conquered enemies? Begone!

(The ghosts walk about him threateningly.)

Ye bodiless besiegers, fret yourselves
With desperate prancing, I shall sleep again.

(They continue to hover around him.)

1st Gh. A magic sleep we'll cast upon thee here.
2nd Gh. A magic spell that cometh from the dead.
VLAD. Your whitened forms belie your black designs.
1st Gh. Whose tears didst thou pour in the marriage cup?
2nd Gh. Whose nuptial kerchief didst thou spot with blood?
VLAD. Contemptible accusers, hence, or else
I 'll drive my sword thru your lean pallid forms.
1st Gh. Thou soiled the white betrothal-taper wax.
2nd Gh. Thou filled the bridal coffers with thy curse.

VLAD. Pale wizards, hark! Why do ye taunt me thus?
Know ye that I am one of Odin's wolves?
The fiercer one; hence, or I'll snap my jaws.
1st Gh. Thy vampire jaws will soon be sewn together.
2nd Gh. Moist mother-earth will ne'er decay thy corpse.
She doth not take a vampire to herself.
VLAD. Begone, twin phantoms, whence ye came; begone!

(Vladimir arises and thrusts his sword at them, but they disappear suddenly and Rogneda comes out of the cabin. She is about to strike Vladimir with her dagger, when he turns about suddenly and eludes the blow.)

ROG. Thou 'st killed their mortal parts; their spir'ts still live.
To goad thy soul forever with their taunts;
To show that Earth's allotment is not Heav'n's;
To show thee that the wolf's tooth can be filed
With incorporeal weapons that they use.
O thou brute conqueror, thou murderer,
My martyred kinsmen's ghosts, tho now unseen,
Flare at thee tho thy futile sword is raised.
These mounds wherein they lie are direful graves
Heaped high toward heav'n t' escape the hell thou wouldst
Have thrust them to,—so plant thy falchion here
A sign of mimic conquest of their souls,
Because it can but pierce the dust of earth.
VLAD. Bury thy dagger in my living flesh;
I'm saturate with some power thou canst not slay,
Then I shall draw it out and give it thee,

But my remorseful breast shall never heal
Because my sins 'gainst thee are pinioned there.

(Opens his hauberk.)

ROG. I had forgiv'n thee all but one, yet thou
Didst thrust me forth; my wounds then bled afresh,
And here I am defended by these spir'ts
Whose fragile forms thou wouldst destroy——
VLAD. To save myself.
ROG. From Perun's thunderbolts thou canst not flee.
VLAD. His thunders are afraid of me and when
My shaggy bay steed shakes his sable mane
His image trembles and my enemies
Run off to refuge, fearing they'll be bound
Unto my stirrups by their flowing hair.
ROG. Proud persecutor, thou 'rt a boaster too;
A raven with an iron beak that digs
My joys out of the soil of life, and then
Thou dost impale my heart on thy gold lance,
Tipped with the sharpest steel, and thus I dwell
An exile from thy palace by thy will;
An orphan, by thy swift and thirsty sword
Whose tongue is ever parched with want of blood;
A lover of the gods whom thou dost curse,
But not a suppliant before thy power,
Tho thou shouldst roar like aurochs and shouldst hiss
Like dragons snared in wire grass. Shame on thee,
Who treadeth on our land as if it were
The stirrup for thy stamping foot; who harasseth
Our towns just as the eagle's plumes
And tossing feathers vex the placid waves

In sweeping o'er a lake! O may the hills
Be barriers on the roads thou ridest o'er!
And may my guardian spirits ruffle thee
Till thou, vexed with thyself, dost pray Perun
To pardon thy blasphemous words and crimes.

(Vladimir advances toward her with his drawn sword, whereupon the two ghosts arise again and step in front of him. All stop.)

VLAD. Pale sentinels, I fear ye not. Your tongues
Whose composition's that of conquered spir'ts,
May threaten or implore,—I fear ye not.
Therefore depart and trouble me no more.

(Pause; ghosts remain still.)

Ye unsubstantial watchmen, shall I slay
Ye twice, whit'ning my crimson sword within
Your bloodless sides?

1st Gh. Thou canst not slay us, tho
Thine own insatiate sword were wild for blood.

2nd Gh. Bold slayer, thou 'rt a wizard who would steal
The moon and eat the sun.

VLAD. Begone, I say.

1st Gh. Soon thou shalt slay no more and that fair maid
Who sitteth 'neath the white alatyr stone
Deep in the Black Sea, sewing up our bleeding wounds,
Will rest as will thy sword.

VLAD. Descend
In thy bald hillock, yonder grave!

2nd Gh. Thou art

A great black raven that doth raise its wing
To shut the light out from our land.

VLAD. I am
A white light from the northern land where Odin
Flashes his snowy wings o'er midnight skies,
Like glowing pennons, on whose flames I come
Illumining this southland. See, I raise
My sword to be a shining arch, 'neath which
I pass to bring lights from the northern climes.

(He raises his sword over his head and passes under it.)

1st Gh. 'Neath Perun's mace thy body yet shall quail.

VLAD. Perun shall yield me bread and salt as tokens
Of conquest over him.

ROG. Blasphemer!

VLAD. I shall respect him for a little while
But I 'm not held in leash by sable wood.
My range is wider than his eyes can see
O'er even open plains, no matter where they glance.
I am no spendthrift of my loyalty
To any of the gods, 'bove all to Perun's mace.

(To the ghosts.)

White demons, conjurers of mishap,
Begone or else the whirring of my sword,
Will knell your obsequies!

(Vladimir approaches them, threatening with his sword.)

1st Gh. Put by thy sword
And we shall go.

2nd Gh. Sheathe it and we'll disappear.

(Vladimir sheathes his sword and the ghosts vanish into the mounds.)

VLAD. Go thou as well; thou art my wife no more.
Go from my sight, so that with freer mind,
I'll spend the interim until my death.
ROG. Yes, I shall go and those good spir'ts shall guard
My steps and over thee keep watch. But hear
Me ere thou driv'st me off. Most mighty King,
Thou mayest wave thy sceptre o'er these plains;
Thine avarice may gain command of all;
Thy sword slay many and thy cruelty
Compel the deserts e'en to flow with tears
And rivers to run dry with weeping o'er
Our land; thou may'st fill forests with refugees;
Lay bare our peopled plains; uproar the calm
Of night; confound the daylight with thy frowns;
Blaspheme the sacredness of royal power;
Abjure the names of our divinest gods;
Thou mayest even be a North Sea wave
That sweepeth o'er these plains to wreak its will,
And yet there's one thing more thou'lt be withal,—
Forever and forever shalt thou be
Accursed since thou'st crushed a woman's heart;
Driv'n her from love to hate and filled her soul
With quenchless fires, soliciting revenge
That she can not inflict. I could exhaust
My spirit o'er my tongue or pour it out
With speech, but it will ne'er depart from thee
And tho thy heart's a desert for want of love,
My word shall never cease to rankle there;
Its echoes shall not die in emptiness,
Tho the recesses of thy soul be blank.
Now fare thee well or ill, as best thou canst
With this unquiet heritage from my dead heart

That soon will fester in thine own and stir
Repentance in thy stony being; farewell!

(Rogneda departs hurriedly at the right. Vladimir follows her with his eyes an instant.)

VLAD. 'Tis true, I am a North Sea wave and thou,
Rogneda, art the bay wherein my tide
Flowed then receded, leaving wreckage there,
Strewn on thy shores. Now thou art turned to stone,—
A whetstone, sharp'ning what hath long been blunt,
My drowsy heart and sluggish soul.
What is this feeling that I can not name?
What new god giveth it to me? Doth some
Strange deity I have not known send this
Which I have never felt before? If so,
I'll seek him out and find the name of him
Who putteth anguish in the breasts of mighty kings,
But I must see Rogneda once again.

(Goes out hastily at the right as Boris enters at the left.)

BORIS. He's gone,
Yet I must find him, for they'll soon be here.

(Steps to the right as Resulka hurries in at the left. Boris stops as she approaches him.)

RESUL. O art thou hunting him who conquered us,
And who now spurns our gods?

BORIS. Hush, hush. I have
A message for the king. Trust me and come my way.

(Boris moves toward the right.)

RESUL. I have no part with unbelieving kings.
BORIS. Resulka, thou dost worship wood and stone;
Learn of the Christian God from me.
RESUL. I want
A god whom I can see and feel and touch.
BORIS. Such is not god. Wait here; I shall
Return when I have found the king.
RESUL. Do not go!
BORIS. I must; farewell.
RESUL. O Boris, remember this:
I have shed tears enough for thee to melt
The winter's snows.
BORIS. (*Embracing her.*) Then dry them now, my dear;
All will be well. Now I must go.

(*Hurries out at the right.*)

RESUL. Wild winds
Have dashed tears from my cheeks and carried them
Afar, as if they were clear crystal stars
Beneath the winter's blackened skies!
I've shaken when there was no wind; my cheeks
Have oft been watered when there was no rain.
Moist mother-Earth is moister by their drops.
O, I have moaned with strains the wild winds make
In striking on the bells within our aspen domes!
O Svarog,—Perun, give me help!

(*Enter Vladimir and Boris at the right.*)

VLAD. Too late, too late! And yet what is the use
In seeking her who damned me so?
BORIS. Who was it?

VLAD. O why should dwarfish feelings mortify
A king? I'll not be peaked and pestered so,
Nor let this strange new feeling taint my sword
With sloth or vitiate a conqueror's will.
And yet it hath a perilous root! Ye gods,
Thor, Odin, Perun, cleanse my breast of this!
A giant fettered by a fancy thus!
What was 't she said? I would I could forget!
Out, out, ye villain words! Ye've pierced me thru
and thru
As nothing did before.
(*Pause.*) Some god's done this.

(*Vladimir rushes over to the mounds; Resulka clings to Boris in fear.*)

Where are ye now, ye villain ghosts?
(*Flourishing his sword.*) Arise!
I'll purge you thru and thru with steel and scour
These airs clean with my sword's swift strokes!
Aha, ye do not rise, ye coward sentinels!
BORIS. What is the trouble, my king?
VLAD. I do not know;
I can not say if 't be disease; a god's
Glance or a demon's or her dagger words
That fester in my soul, but something stings
That never hath before and penetrates
Within this breast without sword-surgery.
O let me conjure up those ghosts again
By threats, entreaties, oaths or anything.

(*Leans over the mounds.*)

Ye spirits, rise! Behold I sheathe my sword,

(*Sheathes it.*)

And prayers succeed its whirring swings. O be
Ye gods or anything, come, raze these roots
Of anguish that I know not how to meet!

(*Pause.*)

The gods I know, have giv'n me all I have;
My strength, my sword, my battles and my joys.
This new gift, pain, must come from some new god,
Whom I've not known, so I shall placate him
To take his gift away and let me be.

BORIS. It is the Christian God who gives and takes away.

VLAD. Then I shall search him out. The god
Who masters me without a mace; who drives
This anguish deeper in my soul than e'er
Thor's hammer could; who, unseen, doth approach
Despite my staring eyes, and captureth me
Despite my whirling sword, ah, such a god
Is mine, for what avails my strife 'gainst him?

BORIS. Nothing at all, my King.

VLAD. Then lead me to him.

BORIS. He hath already come to you.

VLAD. What god
Hath come to me?

BORIS. The God that captured thee.

VLAD. I had not thought of it that way. Indeed,
A god comes to a king, then I'm repaid
For suffering; is 't not so?

BORIS. In part, but thou
Must go to him or else thou wilt forget
He is with thee.

VLAD. I can't forget that pain.

BORIS. Then be it with thee ever.

(Sounds of approaching soldiers heard.)

Hark; they're coming!

VLAD. I had forgotten that a battle's near.

(Vladimir moves to the left as Blude and the soldiers enter at that side. Behind them are about twenty peasants, some of whom carry Perun, led by Aloysha.)

The thought of conquest conquers pain and thrills
My arms with power to rain the arrows down
Upon our foes.

ALOY. Invoke great Perun's blessing first;
Bow down to him as doth become the king
Of our most blessed land.

VLAD. Take thy god away.
I've found a stronger one.

ALOY. Blaspheming yet?
Thou infidel, bow down or else our arms
Shall fail, no matter who may be our king.

VLAD. Take thy god away.

ALOY. Wilt thou deny him twice?

VLAD. Yea, thrice, and ne'er again shall I bow
Down to him or post his images
About the land.

(Plants his sword in the ground.)

There; that's my god of war. Now watch
Me bow to it.

(Bows to his sword.)

ALOY. (*Bowing before Perun.*) Gracious Perun, withhold
Thy thunders from us; stay thy wrath,
Grant us the victory altho the king
Doth desecrate thy presence, spurning thee.
Thou great surveyor of our fortunes, may

Thine eyes see our success; thy mace be our
Best sword; thy power, our captain and our guide.

(To the soldiers.)

Perun's appeased, so have no fear. Great King,
Now lead them on to battle, I have prayed.

VLAD. And I; but to a different god who vests
His power in me, who am not lifeless wood.

(He takes a position in front of the soldiers; adjusts his hauberk, and flourishes his sword.)

The King goes forth to war; watch ye his sword
That can prop mountains on its point and cleave
Thru pagan ranks. A litter of lynxes, we,
Who'll drive them hence, like ermines in the reeds;
A bevy of falcons we, who'll hover o'er
A flock of swans, that, fleeing our attack,
Will splash their snow white pinions in the coal black sea!
O tramp the plains unto the fray and let
Our enemies sheathe their blunted swords within
Our chain mail hauberks! We will sow the river banks
With pagan bones; our empty quivers refill
With gems; our helmets with their arrow points;
Our mouths with green wine and with wheaten flour,
And we will make the pagan maids our wives,
For Perun's winds will blow our arrows straight,
And dark woods shall be turned to coffin planks,
And we shall hear the ravens croak at night
As they divide the dead. Trust ye my sword and me,
Beholding whom, the pagans will retreat!
An arrow head's length lies between my eyes;
While fires flash from them as from northern heav'ns.

I am a sea king and an ocean wave;
A land king; yea, a hungry grey wolf too
That prowls o'er plains to snap its prey at will!
Advance then with my strides and trust my sword.

(*Vladimir leads Blude and the soldiers away at the right. Aloysha and the carriers of Perun depart at the left; Boris and Resulka linger in a farewell embrace.*)

RESUL. O Boris, I'll lament thee when thou'st gone.
My gods, watch over him! Forget our arms
In keeping Boris safe! O every night
The light of virgin wax will burn like hopes
Decreasing if thou cometh not! The winds
Will scatter o'er the battle field
My travelling glances, searching 'mongst the dead
For thee. O love me ever! Perun, then,
Shall make thee paths thru arrows thick as forests are;
Thru lances pointing like a sheath of stars.
O love our gods, then, tho the pagan horses fly
As thick and fast as falcons chasing doves,
They will divide to let thee thru! Altho
Their hoof prints be so deep that fountains gush
Forth from them, yet their waters will not flood
Thy limbs, and tho the Khan plucked forests up
And swept the plains with brush wood pines, thou wouldst
Not e'en be touched. O love me, love my gods!

BORIS. Love will not rust with parting nor thy gods
Avenge my battling with another faith. . .
What thy gods do, mine doth and more.
Farewell; I shall return if 't be His will.

(Resulka weeps.)

Weep not; the power of thy falling tears
Will hold me to thy breast against my will.
I must to battle; see, the maidens come!

(Points to the left, then looks beyond the scenes to the right.)

Vladimir's sword gleams in the air; it calls
Me hence; farewell.

(Boris embraces her and departs at the right as Yaroslafna, Elena, Ilya and a few boys and girls come in at the left.)

ILYA. We'll let the Cossacks fight for we must play
Our spring time revels to appease the gods
Who're angered with Vladimir's slights upon them.
So let us sing to them in gratitude
For all the spring joys that we have.

ELENA. Yes, yes.

(The boys and girls wave their greens and shout.)

YAROS. The wheel hath gone, but not the spring.

ILYA. The robber Hetman of the Don
With oars of toughened pine from Tver,
Rows up and down the river on
A boat with oar locks made of fir.

YAROS. Vladimir rows with his sword.

ILYA. And has oarlocks
Of many soldiers.

ELENA. Sing of spring, not war.

RESUL. Yes, yes, forget the warriors' song.

YAROS. O flew the nightingale last night
To coppices green and birchwoods bright,
And sang of my love whose crimson cheeks
Are like the red sun's dawning streaks;

Whose crystal eyes and blackened brows
Are forests deep for love's carouse!
He sang and flew
Ere morning's dew
With pearls bedecked the meadow side:
Well for the bridegroom and his bride!

ILYA. Give us more songs, like falcons flying in a line.

YAROS. Resulka sing your song.

RESUL.

The oak tree's bending, bending low
Altho the cuckoo's flown;
Dear oak tree mine, why is it so?
Why do thy young leaves moan?

And I am bending, bending down;
My wand'ring falcon's fled,
The cuckoo sad sits like a crown
Upon my lowering head.

ILYA. Resulka, what a dirge! Why, 'tis as if
A black bird waved her wing and thus shut out
The spring's light with a feather. Sing again.

RESUL. Another time. The heart hath eyes that see
E'en in the dark.

ILYA. A maiden's heart is like
A forest deep. Come, Kaysan, what's your song.

KAYSAN. O what is spring when that strange king doth sow
Our freshened furrows with tears? O I have seen
Too many tears and too few springs, but ne'er
The spring and tears together as today.

ILYA. Don't weep, Kay, as the others do.
Moustaches
For honour, but e'en goats have beards, you know.
KAYSAN. 'Tis true, and tho the pine is always
green
It often moans.
ILYA. Tho sorrow seldom kills,
It often blights. Resulka watch thyself.
May Perun make thee fleshy, rosiness
Thou canst get alone.
RESUL. O Ilya, hush.
YAROS. Boys wave your boughs again to greet the
spring
Once more.

(*The boys wave their boughs.*)

ILYA. Now Elena, with one sweet song
Our revels shall conclude.
ELENA. (*Taking a bough from one of the boys and flourishing it about.*)
Now sow the millet; Spring is here!
Our golden goblets fill with cheer!
Thru currant bushes flow the streams.
And thru the clouds the warm sun beams.
Ye blessed gods, the day is done,
But glory! Spring hath just begun!
All. (*Singing.*)
Ye blessed gods, the day is done
But glory! Spring hath just begun.

(*The boys wave their greens and shout and march around; bells are heard ringing from the left and evening comes on.*)

End of Act I.

ACT II. SCENE I.

On the balcony of one of Kief's royal palaces overlooking the Dnieper River and the plains.

(Aloysha and Akim enter at the left and gaze afar off over the river and plains towards the east. Time: near evening.

AKIM. I see no signs of them.
ALOY. None at all?
AKIM. No.
ALOY. Ah if he's slain 'tis vengeance of the gods.
AKIM. And if he's not?
ALOY. The gods mean me to make
Revenge. Stop searching; listen to my plan.
Thou art the craftiest man in Kief, Akim;
Thou'lt murder him——
AKIM. For seven thousand roubles;
He is a king.
ALOY. Hush, not so loud.
AKIM. I'll do 't.
ALOY. But wait; the pagan Cossacks may have killed
Him in the fray; if not the gods will cry
For vengeance in my soul. The money's thine
If thou canst do it well.
AKIM. With my companions
It can be done.
ALOY. Hold; who are they?
AKIM. The first
One is the dark night and the second one,
My knife of steel; the third, my splendid steed;
The fourth, my toughened bow and last, the fifth,
My arrow messenger that does the deed.

Act II Scene I

ALOY. O when thou doest thy work may thunders roar
And winds blow that would rend the earth asunder
To make a furrow for Vladimir's grave,
Or throw his body on the threshing floor
Where wizard flails would winnow out his soul.
AKIM. Thou art incensed with him.
ALOY. I am;
So are our gods and e'en the spir'ts
Of our dead ancestors. From the abysm
Of Russia's history they cry; within
This hard earth's walls their murmurs echo loud
And all the gods join with their dire complaint.
Now dost thou understand? They bid thee kill.
Will these wide plains encompass but one god,
Vladimir, god and king? Then they have shrunk
And Russia is too small or he too large.
His swollen power and his lengthening sword
Chafe gods and men. O! I am maddened and grieved.

(Enter Kaysan and an old man. The music of a harp heard from within the palace.)

KAYSAN. Doth he come?
ALOY. No; and if he comes, he dies.
And if he doth not come at all, he's dead.

(The old man looks over the plains anxiously; bows down low and clasps his amulet.)

KAYSAN. (*To Aloysha.*) Be careful; thou art marked his enemy.
ALOY. (*Touching the amulet hanging about his neck.*)
Vladimir can not harm me, Kaysan.
These knotted bat's wings bar the warrior's spear;

Entangle threatening bows in willow trees
And lock their arrows in repose; fear not.
AKIM. Doth king Vladimir wear an amulet?
ALOY. Nay; pagans can not get them.
KAYSAN. But his eye's
His amulet; just look in it and feel
Thy daring die away.
AKIM. Vladimir's eye
Can not unbend my bow.
ALOY. He is not coming yet;
Let us depart.

(*Yaroslafna and Elena enter hastily.*)

YAROS. O is there any sign
Of Boris,—never mind the king.
ALOY. And why?
YAROS. Resulka 's in despair.
ALOY. Bring her to us.

(*Yaroslafna and Elena depart.*)

OLD MAN. I'll speak to her.
ALOY. But Boris hath abjured
Our gods,—he is a Christian now.
OLD MAN. Alas,
He hath abjured what I have kept so long.
Our youths go not our fathers' ways.

(*Yaroslafna with a harp, and Elena, leading Resulka, enter.*)

Dear maid Resulka, Boris hath not come
And may not, for this absence, so prolonged,
Betides some ill, I fear, to our brave men.
RESUL. O let me stay and weep then; pour my tears
Out with my overflowing heart's complaint!
ALOY. Come then, let us depart.

Act II Scene I

(Aloysha, Akim, Kaysan and the old man depart after making searching glances over the plains, darkening with the approach of evening.)

YAROS. Resulka, dear,
My harp of maple wood hath sweeter tones
Than those it gave before, may it not sing
And soothe thy troubled heart?

RESUL. Play as thou wilt.

(Yaroslafna plays upon it, whilst Resulka scans the plains anxiously looking for some sign of the returning army, then she buries her head in her hands and weeps.)

ELENA. (*Embracing Resulka.*) Weep no more.

RESUL. Then let me sing, for grief
Must have its cry, ere it be gone,
And if it vanishes the hastier by tears
Then let me sing my weeping heart to rest.

YAROS. (*Silencing her harp.*) Sing, sing, Resulka, for my harp has ceased.

RESUL. (*Looking out on the plains and singing.*)
My soul is dark and sad; the sun is dim;
Beneath the sword our soldiers fall at Rim;
Upon the warrior's bier our soldiers lie,
And with his wounds, Vladimir loud doth cry.
Our men have fallen 'neath the pagan host,
And Boris, my beloved, he is lost.
The grass hath withered and the leaves are shed;
The days are dark; our silver streams are red;
Gloom echoes in our palaces of gold,
And all unfavored is our prowess bold.
The falcon's wings are clipped; no more, no more
Above the hosts of Don will Boris soar!
Sing with Resulka, maids; sing for our chief;
Thy singing to my heart will bring relief.
The plaintive music of the harp string's tear

Let fall with murmurs on my lonely ear.

(Resulka pauses; Yaroslafna plays a chord on her harp.)

The matin bells have rung; the day's begun,
Yet in my heart there riseth now no sun.
Each morn I pray beside the strong-walled town
Where Dnieper's waters o'er the land flow down:
O River take my shining tears to sea,
That they may light my Boris home to me.

(Yaroslafna plays again on her harp and gradually the darkness of evening grows, the stars begin to shine and bells are heard ringing afar off.)

When vesper chimes with music fill the land,
And twilight dews, the sun's last rays expand,
Again beside the river flowing down
Forever past Vladimir's strong walled town,
For my beloved warrior I sing
And loud across the steppes the echoes ring!
Thou bringest, O Sun, thy warmth and joy to all,
Why doth thy burning beam on Boris fall?
Why hast thou in the desert dried his bow,
With sorrow sealed his quiver and with woe?
My heart throb shakes the reeds that live beside
The restless waters of the Dnieper's tide.
O how shall Boris now assuage his heart,
Or how avoid Khan's arrow's cruel dart?
Weep with Resulka, maids, 'twill bring relief;
Send too, thy tears to beacon home my chief.

(Elena wipes Resulka's tears away; Yaroslafna plays a few chords; night comes on, and the winds blow mists up from the river.)

To-night my song swells louder yet I hear
The wroth winds rudely trespass on my ear.
I weep, repressing every throb and sigh;

Act II Scene I

I gaze despairing on the cold, black sky;
The dank mists girt me as I toss and grope,
'Tis night, 'tis midnight and no star nor hope!
O Perun, thou who knowest, doest best,
Give me my Love, or give eternal rest.
Sing with Resulka, maids, sing for her chief,
Her heart hath broken 'neath so great a grief!

(Elena embraces Resulka while Yaroslafna plays on her harp. Rogneda enters, clad in a long white gown.)

ROG. I heard thy singing from the river bank;
It hath enticed me here and helps me tear
These iron-fetters from my heart.
YAROS. And art
Thou too, Rogneda, sorrowing?
ROG. My grief
Hath blackened bluest skies; made stars appear
As silver sweat drops from the heart of heav'n,
And my misplaced and disprized love
The tragic mis-step of my heart. O what
Is life, when that which life is, is destroyed?
O what's the world when diademed with crowns
That pierce my brow and armoured with chain mail
That clamps my heart, and girdled with the sword
Vladimir wields?
YAROS. O be at peace and hear
The fetters falling from the troubled world.
ROG. (*Embracing Yaroslafna.*)
The spir'ts of murdered kinsmen follow me,
Compelling rites of anguish everywhere.

(Shouts and clangor of arms; sounds of horses' hoofs are heard approaching.)

YAROS. It is Vladimir home from the field again!

RESUL. (*Shouting over the balcony.*) O Boris, art thou there?

BORIS. (*From below.*) Boris is here.

RESUL. O he hath come! As darkness shows
The silvered stars, so out of blackest grief
Comes greatest joy! Deceptive sorrow, flee!
False night that feigneth sadness, painting love
As sable as thy murkiness, away!
O now my glowing eyes fill blackest heav'n
With light and dim the envious stars that could
Not pierce the gloom! O let the night
Ne'er have an end; love's light illumes the plains!

(*More sounds of arms and horses heard.*)

O happy clangors; joyful clash of steel!
War steeds, strike music from the ground again!
Your pawing hoofs beat joyful marches now!
The spear points strike the hauberk's chord of steel
And from their iron fingers, melodies
Spring forth and charm my heart to song!
O happy helmets, lovely swords, sweet bows
That now make music with their stretching cords,
Better than harps of maple wood are ye!
Your martial measures that once filled the field
Are now love's rhythms echoing in my heart!
And your alarms that frightened pagan ears,
To me are but my love's sweet murmurings!
O I had never known nor dreamed
The chorals of cold steel could charm me so.
O sound again, sweet swords, and clash, ye spears;
Lance-laden horsemen, leap so I may hear
The ravishing music of the warriors' arms!

(*Enter Boris, armed and travel stained, with two attendants, bearing lights.*)

BORIS. Resulka, here am I!
RESUL. (*Turning and falling into his embrace.*)
And here am I!
Here let me be forever in this sweet,
Perpetual apparel of my lover's arms!
O heavenly embrace! No dower of gods
Is more to be desired! I'll rest in them
As thou didst rest in golden stirrups to ride
Upon the battle field!
BORIS. Yes, rest in them.
They have hurled lances; wielded swords and dirks,
But now they hold a blessed burden for love,
Not war, which they shall never cast away.
RESUL. O didst thou win the battle, Boris?
BORIS. We did.
We poured our arrows out like burning wine,
And clove their helmets with our flashing swords.
RESUL. O how I love thee! Would I could have seen
One gleam of thy swift circling blade, it would
Have been a beam to glow within
The midmost midnight when I wept for thee!
BORIS. Then great Vladimir drove them from the field,
And, like a falcon chasing ravens forth,
Scattered them wide upon the open plains,
But brave and trusted Blude fell in the fray.
RESUL. O glory! Perun triumphs o'er the pagan gods,
And hath been merciful to thee!
BORIS. (*Disengaging himself.*) Resulka!
Forget that name, for Perun is not God.

(Vladimir, clad in battle array, enters, followed by Akim, disguised, and by two attendants with lights.)

VLAD. Behold the conqueror! Behold your king
Whose arm now stretches from the Baltic wilds
To plains beyond the Don; whose sword doth gleam
In swifter flashes than the northern lights;
Whose steeds without the wings of Pegasus
Can leap the Dnieper at a bound; whose eye
Bewilders lightnings; as they flash,
Their trident forks grow pallid seeing my sword,
Which, when aloft, seems as a comet in the night,
And streaks the coal black sea with silver seams!
Then hail the conqueror whose mighty sword
Makes e'en Thor's hammer envious.

BORIS. All hail
To great Vladimir!

AKIM. All hail to the king!

RESUL. Hail!

ELENA. Hail!

YAROS. All hail our king!

(Silence an instant.)

VLAD. Who's that who doth
Not greet the king.

(Attendants hold the lanterns up to Rogneda.)

Rogneda, is it thou?
Thou in my palace yet? Thou who didst leave
Me with thy noisy curses once, returneth
To mar the tributes to my power
By thine insinuating silence now?
Cry 'Hail the king' and let your curses go!

(Pause.)

Thy silence is reproachful; speak!

ROG. I'll speak
But words that burn thee to thy soul and show
Thy doom. O Conqueror, conquered shalt thou be;
Thy sword may flash, but soon another light
Outshining it, shall make 't invisible;
Thine eyes may gleam, but other fires shall glow
Where now thy savage orbs give lustre to the dark,
And thou, a servant to another king,
Shall cry all hail to him,—thus I greet thee.

VLAD. (*Advancing towards Rogneda.*)
I conquered? Never; who can slay this king
Hath yet to touch a sword. Dost thou not know
I have been nurtured by the trumpet sound;
Yea, cradled in a helmet; rocked on waves;
My flaxen hair hath blown in Baltic winds.
I have been fed with spear points and my quiver holds
As many arrows as a wide ravine;
My bow bends as an oak and when I grasp
A sword, my very grip upon it, whets its edge.
Why dost thou come here then with damning prophecies,
Howling like storms in mountain clefts and thus
Dissemble nemesis before my eyes?

ROG. I am frail virtue wrapped in pallid flesh,
The sight of whom doth anger thee because
Thou 'st sinned against my life.

VLAD. Well, what of that?
Thou canst not harm me now; I'm far beyond
Thy reach, hence do not try to cross this gulf,
Spanned by thee with a bridge of words, to reach
A feast of bones.

ROG. As when the falcon moults
He drives the birds away, so moult thy sins

And then thou'lt be a desert where there is nor good
Nor bad; shunned by each man and hence
Thou canst begin anew, a valorous virtuous king,
Whose heart's not forged with steel but human blood,
And tempered by a woman's sorrowing.

VLAD. No, no; distempered by a woman's words.
Leave me; thou hearest. Evil genius, leave.

(Vladimir advances still nearer toward Rogneda, flourishing his sword, at which instant, the ghosts of her murdered father and brother arise and stand at either side of her.)

VLAD. Aha, my flashing sword that soweth fire
And scattereth mine enemies and bringeth death,
Revives the dead! Gifted by gods it is!
And whom it striketh down by but one flourish,
It raiseth up with two and sendeth back
With three! O master weapon, whirl again!

(He flourishes his sword three times around, but the ghosts remain.)

1st Gh. Thy sword shall henceforth sow nor fire, nor death.

2nd Gh. The sheath will close its eyes and quench its fire.

VLAD. Away, false prophetess and take thy spirits
That conjure in the name of other worlds.

(Pause.)

What, thou wilt not? Then for this silent mutiny
Against my will, be like a leaf before
The northern wind; a grass blade 'neath
The land king's iron sandal or a wave
Before the sea-king's bark and ride upon
My sword point thus before my cavalcade.

Act II Scene I

(Lunges forward with his sword pointed at Rogneda, just as Akim, crouching near her, takes his bow from under his cloak and aims at him. Rogneda, seeing Akim's intentions, springs between him and Vladimir, just as Akim shoots, thus receiving the arrow from his bow and falling dead at the king's feet. The ghosts depart and the attendants seize Akim.)

VLAD. Hold him fast, men; what villain can he be?

(Looking at Rogneda lying dead.)

Thou 'st ridden upon an arrow point to death
Whilst I had rather have thee go astride
My sword! But yet thou art Vladimir's shield;
Traducer turned protector. The lance that lurked
To kill the king, hath the king's accuser,
Because she sacrificed her life for his.
O woman, how thy words belied thy heart!
Now thy recumbent tongue speaks true,
Petitioning as ne'er before. Thy silence
Roars in my hollow heart; thy fast closed eyes
Now dart their burning fires into my soul,
And thy recumbent body threatens me!
Thy death reproaches; what is it I feel?
Nor all the wordy threats, nor all the hosts
Of my slain enemies, my captive lands,
Nor those I've killed, could have produced
This most unnatural pang. But one of all
The thousands I have felled, has fallen across
My heart! It is the bloodiest
And most unconquerable field of all.
But since thou liest there, Rogneda,
I'll bury thee within its living soil,
And on thy grave, deep hollowed by that arrow,
I'll pour my helmet full of tears I should

Have wept before! And from that crystal mound,
Reflecting love's light, which nor winds nor rains
Of Time shall ever wear away, thy ghost
Shall rise to rule my savage soul, whene'er
I raise my sword to do a wrong.

(Holds up his sword before his eyes.)

O thou false comet, go in thy murky sheath.

(Sheathes it.)

I'll not need thy light for such dire misdeeds
I would have put thee to, to-night.
Maids, take her body up and bear it hence.
She rose against me, but more willingly
Sank down to death that I might live.

(Yaroslafna, Resulka and Elena bear Rogneda's body away.)

Guards, bring that man here.

(The guards bring Akim before Vladimir.)

What madest thou do this?

AKIM. *(Throwing off his disguise.)*
Great King, 'twas seven thousand roubles did it.

VLAD. What, Akim, is it thou? Whose roubles? quick!

AKIM. I do not know whose they were.

VLAD. Aloysha's?

AKIM. I can not tell; I know not.

VLAD. Take him hence.
Imprison him.

(Two guards go out with Akim as a messenger enters.)

MESS. An embassy awaits thee, King.

VLAD. Let it wait.

(Messenger departs.)

Act II Scene I

BORIS. (*Seeing Vladimir in a meditative attitude.*)
Thy soul is sagging with this sorrow, King;
My God alone can bind it up; His chords
Can never stretch as bow strings. If thy heart's
A vault where lieth one whose angry speech
Hath donned the dirge's tone, O quicken it
By sympathy to song, for song will yield
More peace than vibrant bow strings whir,
Or arrow's hiss or hauberks hollow tone.
VLAD. Ah, what I feel I felt but once before.
'Tis something damnable! O I could wring
My heart dry so that every drop of blood
In falling to the earth, washed out this pain!
Oft have I blown mine enemies hence upon
My battle-trumpet's blast and thus I'll thresh
My mind and blow this chaff away!
Out, out, I say! I'll bear no graves within
My breast! I'm not a burial ground! Hill caves
Are better tombs than is my flesh! Dead words,
Dead threats, dead glances, yea, dead cruelties,
Ye must have other burial than herein.
O, that a conquering king, whose sword
Hath been the spade for countless graves,
Should now himself be made the sepulchre
For this unending pain! Rogneda,
Thou she-devil——
BORIS. Stop!
VLAD. Thou commandest the king?
BORIS. No; I defend him from the only foe
Who now can conquer him.
VLAD. Where is my enemy?

BORIS. Where neither spear nor arrow reaches him,—
Upon thy tongue.
VLAD. Thou liest; 'tis this pain
That she hath planted here and she must pluck
It out.
BORIS. My King, thou must do that thyself.
Art thou who conquereth continents, incapable
Of that?
VLAD. Why taunt me thus? There's naught that I
Can not do.

(Draws his sword and flourishes it.)

See my sword whose gleam,
Blood can't bedim.
BORIS. Then clear thy soul of pain.
Wert thou a conqueror, then conquer all.
Wouldst thou be king, then rule the mutiny
Thou blamest on the dead. Thou coward king,
Thou 'rt conquered, abdicate!
The mightiest kings have little flaws whereby
They're chattled much as bondmen are!
How many flourish swords above the ground
And think it is the only world!
How many hauberks turn the spear points off,
But can't defend the breast against
The arrows of remorse!
How many monarchs ruling only half
Their realms, wear whole crowns on their heads!

(Vladimir draws back his sword making ready to charge Boris.)

Strike; here's my breast; strike hard. If I can't help

My king in conquering all things whatsoever,
Not merely pagans on the battlefield,
But his own sufferings, then let me die.
If thou art stronger without Boris' aid;
Canst conquer everything, and quell thy pain,
Then whet thy sword upon my bony breast
To make it sharper for thine enemies,
And when they're slaughtered, turn it on thine own,
To see if steel can cut thine anguish out!
O wouldst thou be a mortal king like others,
Then think thy sword enjoys immortal power.

VLAD. (*Still threatening Boris.*) Thou traitor, Boris, die!

(*The ghost of Rogneda appears and steps between them.*)

Thou here again!
Thou human torch whose white ascending flame
Outshines my glowing sword and burning eyes;
Upcurls from graves of blackened earth and bears
Rogneda's form, why flasheth thou o'er me
As arctic spirits that hover o'er the north,
Threatening the white world with their wide scimitars?
I've conquered every land but thine—beyond
My sword point's reach,—a coward realm is it,
That only threatens, never punishes!

ROG. A merciful world it is whose threats accomplish
Its good designs without its punishments.
It threatens now, great King; refrain
From thy too frequent sword thrusts or my world
Which thou canst never conquer, does thee ill.

VLAD. Begone, thou unsubstantial prophetess!
Sink down again!

ROG. I'll never sink until
Thou art redeemed.

(Vladimir plunges his sword thru the ghost without any ill effect.)

VLAD. Ah, why is this?
My sword hath never swung so swift before
And done so little ill.

ROG. Thy sword can do no harm
To me. O mighty King, now thou hast learned,
It's not omnipotent. Thou mightst as well
Strike at the crescent moon to lop off its horns
As at me. I'm thy sin; thy sorrow too,
And thy remorse, which swords can never hew
Away, and on this light frame I shall bear
The huge grief of a mighty king until
He finds his sword of no avail. Prove me;
Strike thru my breast and see what thou canst do.

(Vladimir plunges his sword into Rogneda's ghost without resulting in harm.)

VLAD. (*Throwing down his sword.*)
Thou traitorous steel, where is thy power gone?
And what's Vladimir when his sword is dead,
And he sunk in a shallow? Thou false weapon
Blunted with shadows; sharpened on pagan bones!
How like my strange heart which hath borne
Unfeelingly a thousand murders, yet is pricked
By what some soft tongue saith! What god have I
Offended that he pains the great king thus?

BORIS. That God whom thou hast not yet found.

VLAD. And what
Defense have I since spirits dare the precincts
Of my sword and tread upon its point?

ROG. Thou dost not need defense against them now.
I shall watch over thee. Come, follow me,
And leave thy sword upon this fatal field,
Thus to absorb the spirit of its enemy
And gain a better power. Come, follow on;
Thy kingdom lieth yet in store for thee.

(*Rogneda's ghost departs thru the doorway.*)

VLAD. How strange thou art, thin temptress! Leave my sword?
Then I shall leave my life, my power, my all.
My sword's my tongue, my crown, my pillow too.
Why leave it here? My kingdom's yet to come?
What kingdom is 't? The great white world is mine;
And yet the earth is strange, strange as that ghastly tongue.
For where 'tis darkest and most cold, white fires
Glow o'er the long horizon lines to yield
The frigid glooms more light and heat. How can
My sword gain other kingdoms, push aback
Russia's horizon line by lying here?
Up, up, good weapon; thou 'rt my line of sky
Yon which I can not see; thou art the light
That gleams intenser than the snows
Or northern fires in this strange world; thou art
The grey wolf's fang; the salt wave's stinging drop!
What other kingdom can there be than thine?

(*Vladimir picks up his sword. As he does so loud moans are heard, and he bends low to listen.*)

BORIS. The spirits of the dead complain.
VLAD. The earth
Groans as my sceptre hovereth over it.

(*Vladimir straightens up.*)

BORIS. O kill me now; I'll join those spirits of pain,
And, since I can do naught in this, I'll sing
In th' other world, my dirge and plea to save
The great Vladimir's soul from sin and woe.

VLAD. Dangle no risks before my sword nor tempt
Me while this pain treads out the bitter vintage
Of my perplexity. Ah, what is it
To be a king thus badgered in the prime of power
By what I can not slay? And what's my sword
Whose thrusts are efficacious everywhere
But where these double woes encamp? I would
A bier of sword blades bore my body hence
Than I should be the living urn
Of this inveterate pain! O I can easier
Tread down the earth beneath my feet than stem
This wizard tide of woe! I know not why
It is, if 't be not of some envious god;
Nor whence, if 't be not from Rogneda's eyes!
What hath the great king done that he should sup
On pain? The green wine's bitterness hath lodged
Within his throat and will not down. Hence, my good sword
Shine, flourish, sever trunks from limbs,
Or penetrate the crusty hauberk of the earth,
Pierce all things else but this, Vladimir's pain,
For that, no mortal blade can ever touch!
Hear, O ye gods and peoples of the world,
The great king, 'midst the conquests he has made
Is conquered by a stranger power; amidst
His sword's flare, shadow like he stands;

Amidst his conquests, bows he like a slave;
Crowned with the regal diadems is he,
Yet stoops a vassal, humbled that he might
Become a king again.

BORIS. Thou speakest well.

VLAD. O I must follow her for I'm a liege
Unto a ghost. My mastery of land
And sea, seem little conquests now, since this
Strange world doth lie before my sword. On, on,
To this collateral conquest! Boris, be
My colleague in this new exploit.
I love thee; thou art brave; with thee I'll make
My pliant sword the springing board wherefrom
I'll leap to kingdoms that it can not conquer.
Whether they be high mountains or abysses,
I must leap to them for I hear
The ceaseless syllables of some new god
Pace o'er my soul and I must follow them.

BORIS. I'll travel with thee anywhere.

VLAD. Come, then.

(Vladimir sheathes his sword and grasps Boris by the hand. They go out together followed by the attendants.)

SCENE II

In the throne room of the same palace. The large doors, one at the right, the other at the left, stand open. Thru the doorway at the right can be seen the balcony and the plains in the distance. Vladimir's throne is set in the middle of the background.

(Aloysha and Kaysan enter at the left.)

ALOY. Hist! Akim tried to kill the king; his shaft
Failed and he killed Rogneda in his stead.
KAY. Poor woman, how she suffered for her lord.
ALOY. Akim's a prisoner and 's cawing like
A raven that is lost.
KAY. Ah me,
Had I an arrow I could lay
Upon my strong bow's silken cord, I'd lay
It there for flight unto his breast, wherein
'Twould dig a furrow, as a chariot wheel
Makes mighty gratings in the soil.
ALOY. Thou wouldst need
Sea-falcon's eyes for that; the wild boar's heart
As well, and that thy old hands might not shake,
Thou 'st need to hold thy bow with sturgeon's glue.
KAY. I would not falter when my bow was set.
ALOY. But set it not; 'tis better thou shouldst live,
Not die as Akim will. Thou art too old
To murder anyone.
KAY. Then may the king
Perform our bidding! Would my heart were young,
Bounding like ermine! Alert and able too!
But now my songs are weapons and my tales
Are arrows that will conquer every foe.
ALOY. Sing to the king; the heart has ears.
KAY. Has he
A heart?
ALOY. He loved Rogneda once.
KAY. His heart
Is deaf, but on my girdle I shall hang three pipes,
Of bone, of copper and of aurochs horn.

My song upon the bone pipe shall resound
Thru pine woods; that upon the copper horn
Sends voices 'mongst the mountain tops, but that
Upon the aurochs, sounds in highest heav'n.
O may my song that reaches there, pass first
Thru great Vladimir's heart, so that our gods
May never be abased by him, nor grieved
By his blaspheming tongue. Thus will old Kaysan sing
Upon his pipes that never will grow hoarse.
He'll make his songs the silken snares t'enmesh
Vladimir's sword!

ALOY. Thy heart's a jacinth stone
That darts red rays as the fair sun; thy tongue
Moves with more power than waving maces do.
So sing thy best, for Akim's arrow failed,
And we must try another way.

(They go out at the right as Boris and Vladimir enter at the left.)

VLAD. I'll shake this off me as the ploughman shakes
The soil from off the share.

BORIS. Stop here, my King.

VLAD. (*Stopping.*) Where did she go? She beckoned me this way.
O what a poor wayfarer I've become;
A hanger-on of spirits which are as frail
As staff wood bridges, yet can thwart my sword.
O Perun, Thor or any god make me
A king again!

BORIS. My God alone does that.

VLAD. Then bring him here.

BORIS. Thou must go unto Him,
Not make a ghost thy goddess.
VLAD. Hark, who's there?

(Goes out at the right; Boris watches him and Resulka comes in at the left.)

RESUL. O Boris, stay with me; thou'st served the king.
Now on the field of love send arrows out,—
The glances of thine eyes. I will not wear
A helmet over mine to stop their flight.
I'll be thy prisoner and thou canst clasp
The hauberk of thine arms about my breast
To keep me safe from sorrow's thrust.

(Boris embraces her.)

O now
I know why I have suffered, 'tis for this!
My life is thine, O to the uttermost!
I am a slender arrow to be shot
Whither thy words or eyes direct.
BORIS. Then trust
My word. I have not served the king in full.
I must not tarry in my quest and we
Can not abide together till 'tis done.
RESUL. And must I sit alone amidst the green of May?
BORIS. Yes; sit alone and sing, thou lovely lark
Of mine! Then braid thy scattered thoughts together
Into sweet song, to solace lonesome hours
With them, until I come to thee,—farewell!
RESUL. (*Withdrawing from his embrace.*) So then farewell awhile.

(Resulka goes out at the left as Vladimir enters at the right, followed by Aloysha and Kaysam.)

VLAD. (*Seating himself on the dais.*) Boris, be judge.
I'm charged with blasphemy of the Russian gods,
By these men whom you see. Aloysha, speak!
ALOY. Thou hast denied the heritage of our gods,
Which, from the Earth's beginning they have had.
KAY. Thou cursest at the pageants of their heav'n,
And laughest at the marriage of the moon
Unto the sun in Earth's first spring.
ALOY. Thou art
A trafficker in holy things; an infidel
Upon great Russia's throne. Thy heav'n's no higher
Than backs of war steeds, and thy brightest star's
Thy sword point, whilst the Earth
Is but a saddle that thou sittest in.
Our gods,—the playthings of thy sneers; our lives
The stirrups by which thou mountest to thy throne.
VLAD. Thou liest, Aloysha; thou knowest thou liest, too.
Thou art a keen accuser, but thine edge
Is whetted with thy hate and jealousy.
When will traducer's lashes fail to swing
Upon their own backs ere they smite another's?
ALOY. O break thy spears upon the pagan's shields
Not on our gods, and empty thy full quivers
Upon the Khan's host, not on Perun's back.
VLAD. Do not speak that name in my hearing.
ALOY. Shall I not speak my god's name to my king?
VLAD. I'm god enough for thee.
ALOY. Blasphemer, hush!

VLAD. (*Stepping toward Aloysha and threatening him with his sword.*)
I'll clip thy brazen tongue and fetter thee
As Akim is,—then throw thy god away.
Thou——(*Looking aside suddenly.*)
Thou too, hearest this, Rogneda?
When I hunt thee, thou fleest; when I forget
Thee, then thou dost appear.
ALOY. Who's here, my King?
Thine eyes look on some forgery of thy brain.
KAY. My king, thou 'rt haunted with some evil spir't.
Come, come, Aloysha; let us flee.
ALOY. Perun's
Dread thunder has come down at last.
I'll with thee, Kaysan; hasten!

(*Aloysha and Kaysan go out at the left, whilst Vladimir stands as if entranced by Rogneda's ghost.*)

VLAD. Why comest thou
To put more omens in my vaulty heart?
Can I not raise my sword unless I lift
The tomb's top off thy grave? Why startest thou
Upon the flourish of the silver pillar
Of the Russian world, whose upright shaft
Shines o'er the sides of this great earth? Do I
Strike thee in hitting at the target of the air?
Or is my sword a strange spade that exhumes
Thy spirit from the void beyond my eyes?
ROG. When wilt thou let me rest? O sheathe thy sword!
Use not its gleams in threatening flourishes
Nor wave its waning fires to kindle wrath,

Nor revel in its shining. Thou must find
Another light, for this one's dying now.

(Vladimir looks at his sword.)

VLAD. I doubt the words thou speakest.
ROG. Whene'er
Thou takest from its sheath thy sword, thou dost
Awaken me from rest. I feel the tremors
Thy brandished weapon makes and I am called
To earth to still their murderous powers. Thou wilt
Ne'er ease thy soul nor mine till thy sword sleeps.
Then will thy newer kingdom dawn and thine
Unquiet heritage will pass away.
VLAD. *(Sheathing his sword.)* And thou?
Will thy plague pass; thy spirit rest?

(Rogneda's ghost disappears.)

Thou 'rt gone so soon? Why am I haunted thus;
My solid flesh moored to a wizard form of air;
My armoured bulk tossed hither, thither so,
By incorporeal shades? O what am I?
A lighter thing than trolls; dust in the wind!
My flesh resisteth arrows, yet capitulates
To blunter things and halts before a shade.
BORIS. Thou art a shadow too and all of life's
The same and mightiest kings are vassals to the thing
That flecks their minds.
VLAD. Canst thou divine no more?
BORIS. Yes; thou art touching quicksands, move away.
If thou wilt question too much what thou art,
Thou wilt not be what thou has been.

(Enter the messenger from the right.)

MESS. My King,
There are new embassies that wait for thee.

VLAD. *(Seating himself on the throne.)* I'll hear them now, so call them in.

(Messenger departs at the right.)

BORIS. My King, hear'st thou those ceaseless syllables
Again? Forget not that which pained thee once;
Remember that the strange god awaits for thee.

VLAD. Where is he waiting?

BORIS. In thy heart.

(Enter four commissions of two men each, from Bulgaria, representing Mohammedanism; from Germany representing Roman Catholicism; the third representing the Khazars, a tribe professing the Jewish religion and the fourth, Greeks, representing the Greek Catholic Church. Aloysha and Kaysan follow them in. All gather about the throne of Vladimir.)

VLAD. What do ye wish of me?

BULG. SPOKESMAN. Great King,
Since thou hast conquered by thy sword;
Since thy successes with the warrior's lance
Have gained this wide domain, we feel our god
Hath tented with thee; and hath helped thine arm to wield
The weapon that Mohammed used, therefore,
We, knowing thy distaste for Russia's gods
Beg the acceptance of our own.

VLAD. Who is thy god?

BULG. There is no god but Allah and Mohammed
Is his prophet, his warrior, yea, his swordsman too.
His heav'n is full of pleasures and is supplied

With streams of milk and honey clarified,
Whose taste will never change. Therein shalt thou
Recline on couches lined with silk and gold,
And beauteous houris shall await thee too.
But wine, by which dissension's sown by Satan
Can not be tasted here or there. Which, then,
Of Allah's benefits dost thou deny?
Blest be great Allah's name, the Lord of all!

VLAD. I love thy conquering prophet but I can't
Accept religions that prohibit wine.

GER. SPKSM. Then hark, Great King, to my words for they bear
A message from the vicar of the Christ
Who died for us and left His church on earth.
Our God rules all; He is the only God,
And our church His sole church within the world;
Our Pope the arbiter on things of truth.
Great King, accept our Holy Church!

VLAD. Thy Pope's an earthly deity; I like him not.
A god on earth 's a monstrous thing.

KHAZAR SPKSM. Then hear of great Jehovah, God of all;
Hear of his prophet Moses unto whom
The Lord God spake. Jehovah is the only God;
With Him thou canst defeat thine enemies.

VLAD. Ah, thy religion's that of wanderers.
On whom some ban of Heaven rests, and I
Do not desire to share thy punishment.
No, none of you will do.

GRK. SPKSM. Most Mighty King,
Hear us for we alone are true and know
The truth concerning how the world began,

And when 'twill end. Whoso accepts our faith
Shall live forever in the other world;
Whoso does not, shall burn in hell.
VLAD. Thou hast
A habit of speech that others have. Ye all
Slight what beliefs ye do not like. We have
Such talk in Russia too; our seers declare
Their faith alone is true. Now some of you
Are liars, yet such lies are 's old 's the world,
And lying like that will live 'till Earth is gone.
GRK. No, no Great King.
BULG. There is no god but Allah!
VLAD. Hush! I'll send my boyars unto your shrines
And see your temples and their priests, for since
No one detracts his own, but praises it,
They'll judge themselves how ye do serve your gods,
And which we like the best, we shall adopt.
ALOY. My King, thou dost forget our own.
KAY. And mine.
VLAD. 'Tis good thus to forget our own awhile
To search for what another thinks is true.
KAY. There is no god but Perun.
ALOY. Thou great King,
Send off these men out of respect for us.
KAY. Do not forsake our gods!
VLAD. I am the king,
If I forsake thine idols——
KAY. Speak it not!
Plan no such thing, but hear my heart's deep song.
(Kaysan kneels before Vladimir and sings in a monotone.)
Day follows day as falls the rain and like
The flowing rivers pass the years and still

Great Perun rules and blesses. Hear ye all
The burden of poor Kaysan's heart! His psalm
Is for our fathers' gods and for our fathers' land.
His pleas are soft as flowing waters are!
Great King, have beds of yew wood; cushions soft
Of whitest swan's down; like a falcon soar,
Or with grey eagle's plumes bedeck thy form;
Ride steeds whose shaggy manes sweep o'er the earth
And hang on one side; steeds whose flowing tails
Wipe out their hoof prints; have a silken lash
And silver spurs that tear thy stallion's side,
So that their prancings raise up clouds of dust
Upon the open plains and their great hoofs
Make furrows in the fields! O have thy wines
In silver flasks all hooped with yellow gold,
Hung by their brazen chains in caverns deep,
To sway with winds and murmur like the swans
At play on bosoms of the quiet bays;
Have suits of chain mail and have sables too;
Have staves of precious fish teeth, velvet pouches,
And taffetas of orange tawny hue;
Have mantles furred with marten; golden thrones
In ash wood palaces; have kingdoms too;
Have all of these; have us and have our land
But leave our gods alone,—take all but them.
O everything, Great King, but our old gods!

(*Kaysan arises.*)

VLAD. What are those things to me who have no peace?
Thy scanty argument affects me not.

KAY. Great King, hear me again!

VLAD. No, no; no more!
The whole world speaks to me and if there be

A god who hath not sent his messenger,
Let him be sent! There is a rift within
Vladimir's soul, world-wide enough for all
The gods of heav'n. There is an image too,
Deep down in its abyss, o'er which
All mortal things may crowd, but never hide.
There is a goddess there,—one not from heav'n,—
One exiled from my palace to my heart,
And now her tears wear down its stony doors
For gods to enter in. O what a conqueror
Am I? Pierced by a spirit yet impregnable
To arrows and to spears! O what a world!
But I will search amongst all gods to find
Him who can reconcile these diverse things.

BULG. There is no god but Allah!

VLAD. Hush! I'll send
My princes to discover if 't be true.
Now all depart. I shall make search alone
Into your separate beliefs.

KHAZAR. Great King,
Adopt our God and spare our land!

GRK. No; ours, Great King.

VLAD. Away, away!

(The commissioners depart at the left.)

Boris, come hither,
I would talk with thee. What thinkest thou
Of this?

BORIS. Send me, my King. I'll make the search
And help to reconcile the world to thee.

VLAD. Come then with me.

(Vladimir and Boris go out at the left, followed by the messenger.)

ALOY. Thou seest it all, as I.

KAY. I would that ermines with the sharpest teeth
Crept in his armoury and snapped his stout
Bows there; broke every silken cord and blunted
The fiery arrows in his quivers too.
Would that the wolves could gallop to his stalls,
Tear open each steed's throat, then bound away!

ALOY. Yes, yes, but what can be done, not what would,
Must be considered. Meek entreaties fail,
And can not clip a feather of his wing.
He soars above all gods but spurneth ours
The most, and measureth Perun by his mace;
His own power by his sword, as if the battlefield
Were both a throne and stage for highest gods.
May Perun seal his quiver, and open his eyes,
Or send his thunders down to threaten him!

(Loud noises and cries heard, at the left.)

KAY. Hark, what is that?

(Noises continue.)

ALOY. Perun pleads for us now.

(The rumbles and noises grow louder.)

KAY. Hark, now 'tis louder; Perun's approaching us,
With 's feet upon steel stirrups that clang as loud
As hoof falls in a stony court.

(Noises continue.)

ALOY. O Perun,
Strike thunders with thy mace again!
Thy glorious speech that proves thy plight to us,

Fills up the hollow dome of heav'n and strikes
Earth's floors and echoes to the sky above,
Outroaring all Vladimir's bugle blasts.
Knock on his hard heart with thy thunders now!
He will not mock thy voice, for it is thrice
An aurochs roar,—not to be scorned by him.

(Noises grow louder.)

Thou iron sinewed tongue; thou throat of gold
Thou wilt be molten with thine anger's fire,
But melt thy muscles into prophecies,
Revenges, punishments! O with thy battering voice
Beat thru the hauberk o'er Vladimir's heart,
And thru his steely helmet to his mind,
That both may understand that thou art God!

KAY. Then will he stand where Kief's towers verge,
Beneath a dome, sheathed with green copper plates,
Well carpeted with tawny yellow sand,
And make repentant bows at Perun's feet.

(Noises burst out again.)

ALOY. Who's coming? hark, the populace!
His thunders dwell upon men's tongues! Ah now
Vladimir, prove thyself a king or suffer death.

(Enter at the left two old men, followed by a large number of men and women, some of whom are carrying the idol Perun. Their shouts subside as they fill the room.)

1st Old man. Where are those infidels who spurn our gods?

2nd Old man. Where is the king who listened to them?

People. He must bow to Perun! He must bow down!

ALOY. Call for him; make him do your will.
When he
Looks once more into Perun's steady eye,
He'll feel the beckoning of his glance.

(Shouts of the people: Great King Vladimir, come hither; bow to our god!)

ALOY. Good folks, ye know Vladimir disbelieves
Our god and bans his holy form and spurns
The gods our fathers loved. O think of that!
Our king an infidel! Shall great Perun,
Whose mace is as the rainbow in the skies,
Whose lightnings are the golden keys
Unlocking Earth's deep waters, letting fountains flow;
Whose flaming darts unbind the wintry fetters,
And pierce the clouds to free the blessed rains,
From those black castles o'er our heads, shall he
Be thus renounced by such a king and changed
For pagan gods of other lands? O wouldst
Ye have the sun cease shining and the rain
Drops wither in the clouds; the stars borne off
On biers to nothingness? Or wouldst ye have
The cuckoos pining ever, barren fields,
And river beds without the waters there?

(Cries: No, no; Perun shall rule!)

Then trust whom ye have trusted oft before;
Command our king's acceptance of our gods,
And do my bidding. When the king comes, bow
As I bow,—lo, he cometh now.

(Enter at the left Vladimir and Boris and several of his armed guards.)

VLAD. What means
This shouting? Why this gathering here? This
idol too.

ALOY. O hear ye all what King Vladimir saith?
My people, bow with me.

(Aloysha and all the people bow to Perun.)

ALOY. Great King, bow down!
VLAD. Thou shouldst not thus command the king.

(Shouts of the people: Bow down, bow down.)

Good people, hear me first. I am thy king,
Sent by thy god. What Perun sends to thee,
Whether 'tis rain, or thunder, famines, plagues,
Or kings as I am, that ye must accept.
Ye are not infidels, so then believe
Perun hath sent me; one so sent doth all
Things well; drives back your enemies; preserves
Your fields from ravishment, and guards your lives.
What can the king do better? Bow? What will
A bow do more than I have done? Can it
Ward off Khan's arrows; keep thy maidens safe;
Defend thy land and grains? I was not sent
To make a bow, but to be king, and will
Not do what I'm not sent for. Hear ye all,
The great Vladimir's heart is heavy too,
Yea, heavier than his head that bears the crown,
And than his breast that bears the hauberk's steel,
For that which burdens him, is grief. He can not bow
As low as 't weighs him down. Therefore,
Good people, go and trust the king ye have.

(Cries of the people: Bow down, bow down! Thunders, winds and falling rains are heard. The people shudder and in other ways show their fear.)

ALOY. Hark, Perun thunders and the voices of the gods

Echo our own. Bow down, Great King and save
Our lives!

(More thunder; the people bow again whilst Vladimir stands among them erect and mute.)

O hear the tongues of heaven cry!

(Aloysha bows again.)

Shout louder, O ye thunders; penetrate
The king's ears that he bow to Perun here!

(Thunders.)

The cavernous mouths of black clouds shout as we.

People. O King, bow down, bow down and save us all.

(Thunders roar, making the palace shake.)

ALOY. Feel how the whole earth quivers at thy sin!

KAY. (*Bowing with the people.*) Bow down, Great King!

(A number of the men leap forward toward Vladimir, threatening him with clubs and crying, "Bow down, bow down." Vladimir draws his sword and threatens the oncomers with it. As he does so, Rogneda's ghost appears before him and is beheld by all.)

VLAD. Thou calm intruder who compels
My wild soul to resume its quietness.
Let me be ruler here! Depart! Begone!

(The people, fear stricken by the appearance of the ghost, draw back to the left door, and tumultuously depart, taking Perun with them.)

ALOY. This spirit subdues the king, so let us go.

(Aloysha and Kaysan go out at the left.)

VLAD. (*To Rogneda's ghost.*) Thou art a flaming prayer contrariwise

Directed, from the heavens to the earth.
Two worlds send orisons to me and now my crown
Is claimed by realms that are beyond my sword.
ROG. When wilt thou let me rest in peace? O sheathe
Thy sword! The sound of whirring airs it makes,
Is cruel thunder o'er my lone abode.
The flashes of its edge are lightnings keen,
Illumining my tomb with garish flames.
Now let me rest! Thy sword threats are the thrusts,
That, more than bitter gall, distort
My heavenly face with pain. O when wilt thou
Discover that thy sword is not a wand
Before whose flourish every world capitulates?
Hence anger heav'n no more; put by thy sword.

(Vladimir sheathes his sword and Rogneda's ghost disappears.)

VLAD. O what a sword,—blunt sharpness, pointless point,
Calm flourish and dull lightning! May the sheath
Forever be its paramour,
If it is faithless to its primal love,—
The fleshy scabbards of those opposing me!
Who feared it not, feared her strange ghost. Hereafter,
When I draw it forth, I'll unsheathe a spir't
From out the scabbard of the other world,
That it may drive back those who thwart my blade.
BORIS. What then, my King? Wilt thou then be at peace?
VLAD. O do not speak that word! It preys upon
The peace I have.

Act II Scene II

BORIS. Thou dost too oft forget
Thy conquest of the other world, my King.
Thy sword hilt tempteth thee; 'tis best to sheathe
Thy pain and let thy blade alone.
VLAD. My sword's
A silver drawbridge over every gulf
But this broad gulf of pain, and over it
No sword can reach. 'Tis true, I do forget,
But I am blinded by the myriad eyes
My blade casts on me. May their eyelids close,
That mine may open on another light!
My soul, be less capricious and my breast
That recklessly hath stemmed a surge of arrows,
Why vacillate before this pain which leads
Me to the world I have not conquered yet?
O Boris, I stumble o'er my precious sword
And totter with thinking overmuch. Ah me,
Irresolution becometh not a king.

(Vladimir reclines on his throne.)

BORIS. Rogneda is thy grief and thy remorse.
Thou must do penance for her; what she saith
About thy sword, is word from Heav'n. Great King,
Obey it now!

(Aloysha and Kaysan enter at the left.)

ALOY. My King, the people wish
To see thee; they desire to know if thou
Art safe. Come, show thyself.
VLAD. I will not show
Myself till ready; bid them trust my words.
KAY. O mighty King, they bade me sing again,
That thou preserv'st our gods. So may my words
Be as fair jewels plaited in the mane

Of thy good steed! And may my song be soft
As saddle cloths thou sittest on; as strong
As silken girths that bind their folds around,
And 's fair as arrow woods within thy halls.

VLAD. (*Rising.*) No more, no more! Thy song resounds within
My fissured heart like hollow noises. Go!
The pleader's process fails with me, so do
The threatenings of this world. Th' impalpable
Sword thrusts of spir'ts alone, can move the heart
Of him who's lorded land and sea. Begone!

KAY. (*Falling on his knees.*) Almighty King, remember Kaysan's plea.

ALOY. And that Perun is angered with thee too.

(*Vladimir grasps his sword hilt as if to draw, but hesitates, then removes his hand.*)

VLAD. (*To one of the guards.*) Drive them forth!

(*As the guard proceeds to do so, Rogneda's ghost appears and Vladimir is startled. The guard stops for fear, and Aloysha and Kaysan move toward the door at the left.*)

KAY. He's haunted with a demon.

ALOY. Come, come away!

(*As Aloysha and Kaysan go out hurriedly, Rogneda's ghost disappears.*)

VLAD. Alas, the great king can not use his sword,
For fear disturbing souls. My blade's within
A pillory, a tomb, where it must lie
Till penance shall be paid. I'm fettered too;
My guards as well. My sun hath set
Within its sheath, whilst th 'arctic lights still gleam.
What is a king when one by one his powers

Are lost; his sword's edge eaten off and his gold
crown
Slipped round his neck to strangle him?
BORIS. Some god who covets thee, diminishes
Thy power, to bring thee to his throne.
VLAD. Is 't so?
Then two worlds bear upon my soul, but I
Will shake them off, so King Vladimir, rise!

(He arises and strides about the floor.)

Stand upright now! O with my flashing thoughts
That flame before my eyes, I'll see all things
Anew! I'll risk redemption all alone,
And dare the vengeance of all the gods together;
Affront damnation here and everywhere!
Am I a dervis moored to mumble prayers
Before an idol for my shrift? Am I a king
Uncrowned by shadows? O I'll thrust the world
Thru with my sword blade, carry 't on its point
And show the gods my power hath not waned.
I will defy my conscience, be a king
Again and with my world-wide will,—compeer
Of thrice Thor's hammer power, plus Perun's iron
mace,—
I'll challenge heaven's challenge too!
Then out, my sword and better than the dawn,

(Places his hand upon his sword.)

Flush our flat plains with reborn flourishes!
Thy silver lines among the shades, shall spell
My name upon the earth for it is mine.

(Draws his sword and flourishes it menacingly.)

I am a king again.

(Rogneda's ghost appears.)

ROG. Art thou a king
Who dar'st the vengeance of the mighty gods?
They are revenged; thou boasteth idle things.
Thou wouldst affront damnation? thou art damned
Already; thou wouldst see all things anew?
Thou wouldst be god then, watching o'er the earth
Not with the daily, but eternal light.
O abdicate thy will and then be such!
Defy thy conscience? thou defiest naught;
Or challenge heav'n's challenge? Can a drop
Of rain beat down the earth? Wouldst thou be king
O'er all the world? then be a slave
Unto the whole of heav'n.

VLAD. Thou liest, fiend.

ROG. Put by thy sword and grant me peace.
The gods grow tired of my return to earth,
But come I must when thou dost need me most.

VLAD. I need thee not; begone.

ROG. Put by thy sword.

(Vladimir sheathes his sword.)

Heav'n gives me power over it and so
Its sheath shall hold it till I make it free

(Rogneda's ghost vanishes.)

VLAD. 'Twill flourish when I wish to flourish it.

(He attempts to draw it forth, but fails. As he tugs at the hilt he becomes greatly astonished that he can not draw out the sword, and in a moment sinks back in his chair.)

Thou too, O heartless weapon, spurneth me,
Conniving with the demons that begirt
Thy citadel and thus allying thyself

With th' other world! Then sink, Vladimir, sink
Into the sheath of death and be drawn forth
No more! Let spirits bind thee too, and then
This world's white cheeks will soon suffuse
With crimson blood, afraid of me no more,
For there's a power with which I can not cope
Whose shade eclipses my sword's brightest gleams.

BORIS. My King, ally thyself with that power then,
And thou canst be more great than thou hast been.
O seek the God to whom thou pledg'st thy steps,
Him, whose undying voice sounds in thy soul.
O falter not; forget not thine intent.

VLAD. Then come, my Boris, come; we'll search again.

(Vladimir and Boris go out at the left.)

SCENE III

Place, same as in the previous scene.

Vladimir, Boris, Aloysha and Kaysan are standing just under the lintel of the door at the left.

VLAD. Yes, Boris, lead me in; my eyes are so
Bedimmed, I know not why. I can not see
My way.

(The four enter and Vladimir, led to the throne, sits down.)

ALOY. Thy sight fades, Great King, as the punishment
That Perun sends upon thee. O, bid me
To intercede and palliate the pain.

VLAD. Hush, hush! It is not so; and how could I
Extenuate my sin before a stock?
O Boris, dear, I can not curse for fear
Offending Him who sent this suffering.
I can not pray, for what god hears
Apostate's to them all? O I have been
A godless god myself; here's my reward,
Albeit I am a king: eyes dimmed, my sword
Imprisoned and this pain within my heart.
Wait,—let me feel my sword again, perhaps
The sheath's unsealed.
(*He feels it.*) Nay, nay; not so.

KAY. O I would cast myself into the sea;
Lie at the bottom like alatyr stone,
Beyond the reach of stormy winds, if thou
Wouldst bow to Perun; be forgiven thus,
Great King.

VLAD. Do not prescribe for me that way.

(*Enter at the left the three commissioners whom Vladimir sent to investigate foreign religions.*)

BORIS. Ah they come, they come!

VLAD. My commissioners?

BORIS. Yes, my King.

VLAD. Then let them come before my throne.

(*The commissioners approach toward him.*)

Now tell me what ye recommend.

1st Com. My King,
We beg thee to adopt the Christian faith
As practised by the Greek Church,—it is best.
We went into Bulgaria and saw
The worshippers in their temples where they make
Obeisances and then sit down and look about

Like madmen, for there is no joy 'mongst them,
But sadness and a great stench. Then we went
To Germany where we saw many rites;
No beauty was there in them. Then to Greece
We journeyed; saw the ceremonies there,
And did not know if we were on the earth
Or in the heav'ns. God lives among the people
In that land for their service is so great.

2nd Com. For us the priests donned holy garments, so
The glory of their god might well be seen.
They lighted golden censers; sang; arrayed
Themselves in most luxurious copes and stoles,
And then performed their ceremonies, fine and grand.

3rd Com. They had no black cowls as the western monks.

VLAD. My grandmother Olga was baptised
Into their church,—such shall be done to me.

BORIS. And God Almighty shall restore thy sight.

VLAD. My heart feels more unburdened, Boris.

1st Com. There is a priest whom we have brought with us
To tell thee of his church, its faith and law,
And if thou wished it, baptise thee too.

VLAD. Bring him hither.

(A commissioner steps to the door at the left, and an instant later returns with the priest.)

ALOY. What! the Christian priest?
No, no; he must not come. Great King, hear me!
Speak not with him; I can not witness it.
Grant me this prayer! I would wear down my tongue
With pleas; corrode my lips with speech, if such

Would save our gods. Wouldst thou expect sweet
flowers
To bloom when thou hast torn their roots away?
O wouldst thou seek heav'n's blessing then, whilst thou
Dost so repudiate our gods? I bear
The dark grief of the great white world
Whose pale plains slowly grow to green, altho
The spring's far spent.
VLAD. Bring forth the priest. I bear
The curses of the other world and he
Who shows me freedom hath an audience here.

(The priest stands in front of Vladimir.)

Canst thou instruct me in thy faith; receive
Me in the church of God?
Pr. Great King, I can
Instruct thee here, but thy baptism must be
In Kherson, the city of the Greeks, which thou
Must take by arms.
VLAD. It shall be done; it shall!
My heart feels lighter now as doth my head
When from its crown the helmet's lifted off.
Mine eyes regain their sight! A vision comes!
It is the true God, He whom I have found
Not by beholding heav'n from stormy crests
Of Baltic waves, nor from a mountain height,
Nor from th' aspiring peak of my bright sword,
Nor by the scrutiny of plains between
My helmet's visor; no, by none of these,
But by the pain within my heart, by grief;
By visitations of a martyred soul;
By thee, good Boris, who hast urged me on
To other conquests than my sword could make.

And now there is but one more battle for it,
And then to rest.

BORIS. Great King, thou 'rt greater now.

ALOY. If thou art greater and our gods are less,
They will no longer bless the land they loved.

KAY. O King, attach thy steed with silken halters
Affixed to spear points driven in the earth;
Go on no further,—Kaysan's heart will break;
O shiver the sacred ring-barked oak, and let thy bow-horns creak
With anger in thine aim; beat us as slaves
With knouts made of three stranded cords, but leave
Our gods alone, for they support our land.
With them we live; without them we would die.

VLAD. (*Arising.*) I swear here by my mace of steel, I will
Baptise you all, when I am so immersed.
Yea, tho ye hiss like dragons and like aurochs roar;
Tho ye pile jewels up a spear length deep
And give them to me, I'll perform the rite.
Then where ye are thus washed, I'll wash my sword,
And Dnieper's stream may take its stains to sea.

(*Kaysan and Aloysha bow before him.*)

KAY. Great King, why wouldst thou thus destroy our gods?

ALOY. O spare them for us, King!

VLAD. Up, up! Begone!
Give me no more such pleas; depart!

(*Kaysan and Aloysha arise and depart at the left.*)

One thing
Must now be done before I can depart.
My sword must be released; Rogneda, hear!

Give Up Your Gods

The embers of my flinty heart, aglow
With righteous fire, move me to take
Immortal vengeance on my sinful blade.
Undo thy clasp, strange spir't! But once more
Shall my sword wave, a banner of mute steel
Afloat in battle trumpet's gusty blasts;
Once more stretch like the silver comet's flash;
Once more make envious the northern lights;
Once more flush like the false dawn o'er the land,
And then 'twill fill its sheath,—its tomb at whose
Closed door its hilt shall lie, a monument
On which my clutching fingers make impress
Now for its epitaph.
(*Draws his sword.*) Hail, thou good steel,
'Tis heav'n that thus unseals thy sheath
And gives me sight again. O nevermore
Shalt thou make blasphemous flourishes;
Thy strokes shall never tempt the gods again,
Or emulate the lights of day and night!
And now I thank Rogneda and my god
For thy release, good sword! Now I shall go
Hence and receive instruction in thy faith,
Good priest. Come Boris, thou 'rt my teacher too;
Soon I shall march to Kherson.
(*Flourishes his sword.*) Flash, my sword,
And hurl thy steady beacons o'er the south;
Star-treader, thou shalt tread the earth once more,
And help to bring the peace of heaven here!
Thus let the Russian gods and idols mark
This day, this march, and mind of mine, for soon
They shall be barred forever from this land.

(*Vladimir leads and the others follow him out at the left.*)

ACT III

On the broad shore of the River Dnieper, near Kief. At the right, just edging on the scene, is a wheat field. In the background flows the river and beyond it can be seen low-lined knolls and hillocks. Enter at the left Elena, Resulka, Yaroslafna, Ilya and a few boys and girls. As they come in, several birds fly away from the corn.

YAROS. O * Lado, Lado, on the mound
The nightingale weaves its nest;
The oriole's is all unwound,
It loves the wheat fields best.

Dear oriole, go weave thine own,
For thy dear young so sweet.
O leave the fields where corn is sown,
Nor peck the summer wheat!

(The girls run to the field and pick some ears of wheat and weave them into wreaths.)

ELENA. We'll plait the bearded stalks and make them wreaths.

ILYA. Other birds peck at the grain.

YAROS. The ear has come
To white wheat and to corn.

RESUL. It is the gift
Of all the gods.

ELENA. (*Crowning Ilya with her wreath.*)
I crown thee with a crown
Of gold.

* Lado was the god of mirth and general happiness.

YAROS. (*Also crowning him.*) And with this sheathe of corn I crown
Thee too.

ILYA. The ear is on the corn and wheat!
Out of each ear a measure;
Out of each grain a loaf to eat;
And from our gods this treasure.

(*He bends low toward the east, west and south.*)

And from our gods this treasure.

(*Aloysha enters at the left.*)

ALOY. O let me bless the ground first ere ye reap.

(*He draws a sickle.*)

Then with my scythe I'll cut the stalks and ye
May wreath them for a crown for Perun's head.
Good Earth, I bless thee, for from thy black soil
And heav'n's white rain drops, cometh golden grain.
Perun, thou great transmuter, hail to thee;
Hail now, but nevermore.

YAROS. What?

RESUL. Why nevermore?

ALOY. The king's destroying our idols, scourging them.
'Tis he transmutes all things, e'en changes plains
To pris'ns; makes seas the solid ground; wild waves,
His watery hauberks no one's prow can pierce,
And these flat lands, the ramparts which the Khan
Can never scale, howe'er he shall besiege;
He changes mountain barriers to roads;
Transmutes his sword to a resistless mace
That rivals Perun's; changes night to day

And maketh arctic lights grow dim. He calls
The dead to life; the living to their doom;
Transmutes the earth to hell wherein his God's
Enthroned, whilst he makes ours a whipping post.
O had this old earth ever such a king
Who rules with rashness; judges with his sword;
Extols the demons of the underworld,
Spits at the gods of heav'n and leagues with hell?

(*Thunders heard.*)

O he is casting down our idols now!
Hark how they fall; the thunders roar and Earth
Is reeling from her resting spot and Heav'n
And hell shift places following it, upon
The beck and nod of such a mortal king!

RESUL. Is Boris with him in that desecrating work?

ALOY. He is, Resulka. All is over now;
Eternal night come on me; let me die!

(*Aloysha weeps.*)

RESUL. Dear Boris, thou dost slay me! Thou art lost!

YAROS. We're doomed; our souls are lost.

ELENA. O cut the grain,
Aloysha, make thy crown for Perun's head.

ALOY. Yes, let me harvest while I may. I'll cut
A sheaf for his immortal head!

(*He cuts the grain.*)

What cometh from the gods returneth there.
Wind it, Resulka; twist it to a cord
Vladimir's sword can't sever. May it bind
Us to our gods and them to us.

(He gives a handful of grain to Resulka who twists it and makes a wreath of it.)

Now 'tis a ring
Of bearded grain that plights our love to him
Who lies beneath Vladimir's lash. I'll go
And place it on great Perun's head.

YAROS. We'll go
With thee; come all.

(Aloysha goes out at the left followed by all except Resulka.)

RESUL. I can not go.
(Boris enters at the left.) Boris,
How couldst thou do it? O how couldst thou strike
Upon my heart and with that infidel,
Scourge Russia's gods? O when I saw thee stand
Bright like a burning taper in the temple,
Then all the world was love, then all was love!
When thou didst speak, thy words flowed as a stream;
Thy ruddiness was taken from the sun;
Thy fairness from the white snows and thy cheeks
Were crimson like the poppy; thy clear eyes
Were as the hawk's own and thy brows were black
As sable's darkest hue, but now thou'rt changed.
Thy soul is forfeited to evil spir'ts.
So let us separate on earth that we
Shall grow accustomed to estrangement here
To soothe its bitterness in after life.

BORIS. My God's too great and good and kind to let
Us part here or hereafter. Give one name
To what thou callest gods. Say God whose Son
Is Christ, the king of all on earth, who died for us

And rose again to Heav'n. Thine images
Are wood,—they're lifeless, powerless too. O give
Them up,—the living God is thine, tho thou
Knoweth it not.

RESUL. O Boris, how can I?
Shall I be traitorous to Russia's gods?
No, no; it can not be. Farewell, farewell!
O neither by the morning's dawn or evening's glow,
Nor at mid-day nor 'neath the many stars
And moon by night, nor in the stormy winds
Shall we together be again,—farewell.

BORIS. (*Embracing her.*) Resulka dear, where wilt thou go? The king's
Destroying thine idols; soon he will compel
The people to the river side to be
Baptised.

RESUL. O worse is he than furious blasts
That ride in winter from the northern skies.
I must go, Boris, let me pass.

(*Boris releases her and she departs at the left as Kaysan enters, unnoticed, at the right.*)

BORIS. Almighty God,
Help me to win her to Thee, else my life
Is only half-fulfilled! What is the world?
A river bed life flows thru; what's the sky?
Earth's helmet visored with the stars thru which
We see eternity! O what am I?
A bow-string sagging when the arrow's shot?
Nay, I'm the arrow, which may God discharge
Into her trembling soul, that it may feel
No felon blow but just a gentle wave
Of life, like that which laps the sedges here

And feeds their roots. Then, Mighty God, renew
The pulse beats of Thy bow, draw back its cord
To shoot this arrow in Resulka's heart!

KAY. (*Coming forward from the field at the right.*)

Thou infidel, I know thou 'rt for the king.
May Perun strike thee, Boris; mayest thou
Be scourged by plaited manes, full three ells long!
Thou dost abet the king who's hurling down
Our gods into swamp waters and marsh grasses!
O for old Kaysan's sake, bid him forbear!
May thy words be as silken snares
That will enmesh his waving sword! The ravens caw
All night; a red plumed crow alit upon
The palace yester eve; our land is doomed!

BORIS. Good Kaysan, peace; we're safe and can live well
Without the idols; weep no more, nor curse
The king.

KAY. O Boris, could I fit
A poisoned arrow to the cord, then draw my bow,
'Twould kill him where he stands!

BORIS. It would but strike
The golden cross he wears and glance aside.

KAY. He wears a cross and will not bow to Perun!
His base heart damns our land.

BORIS. Kaysan speaks false,
But slander does its harm; it is like coal
Which, if it doth not burn, will soil our hands.
Before I go, good Kaysan, see my cross.
The king and I swore brotherhood and then
Exchanged the crosses that we wore.

Act III

(Boris shows his cross to Kaysan, who looks, then turning away from it, wipes his eyes with his handkerchief and does not look around again until Boris has gone out at the left.)

KAY. *(Alone.)* Vladimir is baptised! O curséd waters,
Why did ye open that he might arise
From out your depths? O would he were within
His iron bound coffers with his jewels there!
And if his palace covered seven versts,
I would not enter in, and tho green wine
Gushed forth from every hoof print of his horse,
I would not drink a drop of it!

(Enter at the left Yaroslafna, Elena, and a few boys and girls.)

YAROS. Good Kaysan,
Thou bendest as the willows do and singest
Despairingly as well thou mightst,—our gods
Are gone!

ELENA. I'll make a wreath for Kaysan's head.

(She cuts some wheat and winds it into a wreath; Kaysan sits down.)

KAY. Then let me sing my last song ere I go!
My heart is fluttering like the falcon's wing;
My song is like the white swan's ere it dies!
My dreams flee like the ermine coursing thru
The river grasses and my mourning hopes
Are quivering like the bow string that hath sprung.
My heart beats on my breast as arrow cases
Upon a rider's back. My girdle is a rag,—
No flaming sword belt as Vladimir's is!
No glittering casque is mine nor dapple bay;
My pilgrim foot's my staff and my white hairs

The silver armor of my head; my swords
Are songs but they are dull and blunt with strokes
Upon Vladimir's stony heart. O now
His spurs tear thru my breast as if it were
His horse's flank! So let old Kaysan die;
Yea, die with Russia's gods; as they are, so is he.

ELENA. Then be thou crowned as Perun, with this wreath,

(She places it on his head.)

And when thou diest, take it to the gods,—
A token of thy endless homage here
To Perun, whom our king repudiates.

YAROS. It is a crown with yellow tassels, Kaysan.

ELENA. 'Tis earth's brocade that we have harvested.
To clothe old Kaysan in.

YAROS. And if his girdle
Is made of rags, his crown's of tawny gold.

ELENA. His heart is steady like the massy ground.

(Mingled shouts of gladness and sorrow heard, sounding afar off at the left.)

KAY. Hark! Perun's groaning; he is dying, so May I!

(He sinks to the ground, and the girls attend him.)

ELENA. Here,—lay thy old head in my lap.

(Places it there.)

KAY. While falcons meet together 'mongst the oaks;
White cygnets in the green woods; gods on high!
So may I meet with them! Farewell, good friends,
This song and then I die.

(The shouts continue and grow louder.)

Hark, how he groans!
But I shall sing and singing, die. These fields,
Harrowed so oft with our swift horses' feet,
Shall bear my tread no more.

(Sounds continue.)

The gods groan, but I sing,
Not dallying with grief, but knowing my end.
O say that I went with my idols hence!
My broken heart is a wind-fractured reed,
Whose music falters, whilst the winds blow on
And waters ravish all,—they are Vladimir's blows;
He is the king and I am only Kay.

(He becomes weaker.)

I've reached Death's cross road and my tired foot
Falls from the stirrup.

ELENA. Here's my handkerchief;
Thou'lt need it in thy future journeying.

(She puts it in his hand.)

KAY. Swathe me in silken cloths.

(Shouts heard very near.)

O hark! I sway
As if in topmost tufts of hardy pines.
Look, look, the king drags Perun in the dirt.
Now I am gliding off; tell them poor Kay
Hath died of grief.

(Kaysan dies.)

ELENA. His light's gone out.
YAROS. He's dead.

ELENA. Come, carry him into the corn where none
Will see him.
YAROS. Where he'll sing no more.

(Enter at the left, Vladimir, with his guard carrying the lesser idols. They are followed by a horse dragging the idol Perun, tied to its tail. Two men are beating it with whips and behind them are men and women uttering loud groans. Aloysha is trying in vain to put the wreath on Perun's head. When the horse stops, he does so; all stand still and the shouts subside.)

VLAD. (*Moving to Kaysan's side.*) Is Kaysan dead?
ELENA. He's dead of grief. The lash
That smote on Perun, wound about his heart
And choked his song.
VLAD. His loyal heart's
A heritage and his sweet songs will live
When idols have been cast away. Thus let
Me pay my tribute to this martyred soul,
Who passed because he loved his gods. O may
His stories and his songs outlive my sword!
Their music's sweeter than the whir it's made;
Their harmony's more beautiful
Than clashing steel; their words less maddened
Than my wild threats and oaths have been! And as
Thy songs, dead Kaysan, have been sung for years
By myriad tongues in myriad climes; since they
Are old, yea very old, since some of them
Have crossed deep seas, have forded streams,
Leapt mountains, travelled sandy steppes to reach
Old Russia's plains; yea, since they have outlived
The dusty dynasties of yore,
Survived the centuries and even human tribes,

So may they still be sung and re-sung too,
By Russia's generations in the future years,
Like an eternal strain of poetry
And music, that can only cease
When human hearts in our land beat no more!

(*Pause.*)

Now take him hence. I love thee better, Kaysan,
Not for thy gods, but for thy steadfastness.

(*Elena and others carry Kaysan into the field at the right.*)

ALOY. Thou wishest our songs to live, why not our gods?
They too have come from far to Russia's plains,
And more praise them than sing dead Kaysan's songs.

VLAD. I do not praise them; that should be enough.

ALOY. However, I have crowned Perun, great King;
My hands that did these final rites to him
Shall never sign the cross upon my breast.
May thine not wanton with the laureate wreath
Upon his head; bare not the cross before his eyes,
Nor hurl thy thongs in heaven's face
To make them fall with sword-like blows upon
Great Perun's back!

VLAD. My God will outlive songs
And idols too; fear not. Now, men, flog Perun well
And cast him in the Dnieper's water here.
If he be god of thunder or of anything,
Let him call down the anger of his heav'n,
Which I shall challenge, for it's powerless.

(*The men untie Perun from the horse, flog it and cast the wreath aside, which Aloysha picks up.*)

Populace. Great Perun, help!

(They fall on their knees before the idol.)

Aloy. Great King, hold off thy men!

(Draws a dirk and advances toward him.)

I'm not afraid of thee or death. Behold,
Thy time has come. Kaysan is dead and I
Will die, but not before I invocate
The retribution of the gods on thee.

Vlad. I may not draw my sword, e'en tho provoked.

(He stands without making any defense.)

Strike if thou wilt; strike as those lashes fall;
Vladimir's pledged his heaven to forswear
His sword,—his God protects him now. Take heed,
Yet strike me if thou wilt; here is my breast,
Wherein no arrow, spear or sword,
Hath ever sheathed itself. By God's command
It hath awaited for Aloysha; strike,
And test my God who gave me sight again.

(Aloysha stands still and the men cease beating Perun.)

Aloy. I know thou art invulnerable.

Vlad. Strike here.

Aloy. I can not hurt thee; thou art like a god.

Vlad. Then let thy useless threats return, Aloysha,
Into the coward heart that made them thus.
Take profit, thereby, for thy future oaths
And learn from my sheathed sword, that I have found
A better power.

ALOY. (*Moving back among the people.*) O thou
art king indeed!
VLAD. (*To his guard.*) Put down those idols,
scourge them then and throw
Them in the river.

(*The guards do so.*)

People. Perun, help! Our king
Destroys our gods!
VLAD. (*Seeing the idols sink in the river.*) Thus
let our fears be sunk
And our old gods depart. Now scourge Perun
Once more and hurl him too.

(*The men whip the idol Perun and carry it to the river bank. The people rush and bow down before it.*)

ALOY. Perun, if thou'rt a god,
Then save thyself! O may thy silver head
Beam thru the murky stream; thy golden beard
Shine like the rising sun! Ye waves, let him not sink
Or he shall order heav'n to drink your rains
And ye shall die of thirst!
VLAD. (*To his men hesitating.*) O throw it in!

(*They throw Perun into the river and in a moment the waters toss it out upon the sands.*)

ALOY. Thou blessed river! See, he is our god!
The waves
Refuse to be thy partners in this crime,
O King!
People. Perun's our god! The king can't harm
Him now!

(*They rush to the idol and kneel before it.*)

VLAD. The waters throw him back? Aha,
Perhaps his heaven's not so powerless then.

I'll see; men throw him in again.
His eyes and ears are full of river mud;
He hears no prayers now; throw him in again.

(They do so.)

Now let him send his lightnings that all Kief
May bend before the waves he lieth in.

(Silence, during which all look for Perun's reappearance. When they are certain that the idol is sunk, they begin to despair.)

ALOY. Sunk, sunk is he! O let Earth sink down too,
With all the woes we bear! Thou wicked King,
Thy footing makes a print upon our hearts
As if 'twere dug with spurs! Thy very eyes
Have antlers piercing thru our flesh, and if thy sword
Is sheathed, thy foot's exposed and spurs
The back of Russia thou dost straddle.

VLAD. Thy gods have gone yet thou art still alive.
So let thine anger go with them. My God
Be thine for this time forth; trust ye in Him.

ALOY. Show us thy god and give return for what
Thou takest away. Why wilt thou martyr us
For whims of thine; plot with thy plagues upon
Our souls; cast down our holy images,
Speaking the while strange names and calling that God
Which can be neither seen nor felt? O King,
Thou takest the Earth away; we tread on air
And our foundation's gone!

VLAD. Stamp with thy foot,
Earth's here; thy gods are gone, thou livest yet.
Thine images are dead but Christ's alive,
Whom death could not withhold, He is our God,
And soon, His priests, who shall baptise us all,
Will show the images of Him which thou
Canst touch and pray to.

ALOY. Thou wouldst make us traitors,
Come people; we can't barter gods nor take,
O King, those of another land, for we
Have prospered with our own and tho their images
Are cast away, we'll love them yet.

(*Aloysha, followed by the people, start to the left as two priests in Greek Church garb enter at that side.*)

VLAD. (*To the priests.*) Now ye are come.
Good people, stop!
Here are Christ's messengers who shall baptise
You where your gods are cast.

ALOY. (*Stopping with the others.*) O thou wouldst make
The stream thine ally and would cradle us
Within its lapping waves to be thus nursed
To love for foreign gods. They shall not clothe
My people in their billowy folds nor rock
Our babes or elders on their watery couches!

VLAD. Whoever shall refuse to be baptised,
No matter whether rich or poor, shall be
In my disfavor.

ALOY. Come with me, my people.
I'll lead you thru this orphan-world,
Step-fathered by a king who cursed our gods,
Expecting that his sword would light the land
In this drear darkness of their banishment.

(The people pass out with Aloysha leading them, as Vladimir approaches and threatens them with his sword.)

VLAD. Stop! (*He flourishes his sword. Rogneda's ghost appears before him.*)

ROG. My peace is intermissive tho I strove
To help thee keep the charge thou sworest to.
When wilt thou cease to threaten with thy sword?
When wilt thou ransom me from my unrest?
O when wilt thou redeem thy bloody weapon
By its baptism to another life?
Thy sword-sheath's like my grave which opes too oft
To let me pass. May both be closed! O let
My mound remain intact forevermore,
Nor waken me with thy sword's blazing countenance!
I hear thine every word; I see thy deeds;
Thine ill-intended hand upon thy hilt
Is like a vulture at my throat and when
Thou flourisheth it angrily among
The turrets of the sky to tempt the gods,
I rise to Earth to bring it down therefrom
Before they shall destroy thy life. O let
Me rest forever now and sink into my sheath
As shall thy sword in thine.

VLAD. Thou beautiful spir't,
Thou ghost-like governess that cometh from afar
To soothe the temper of Vladimir's zeal,
Receive my sword.
(*He offers it.*) O take it hence with thee!
I had forgot my vows and gentle Christ,
In whose name I'd immerse my countrymen,
Yet drive them to it by swords! My fickle temper
Makes fatal strikes betimes, so then receive
My blade.

ROG. It is impossible for me
To grasp Earth's weapons. Thou must save thyself.
Now sheathe thine untamed sword; store it within
The sable coffer hanging at thy side.
Thy land hath need of life, not death.
VLAD. Good spirit,
But once hereafter shall it be unsheathed,
And not to flourish but to be baptised;
Yea, cleansed of its sins, sheathed within
These waters momentarily and then
Forever in this case wherein I thrust
It now.

(*He sheathes his sword.*)

ROG. Farewell again! My spir't
Shall rest the while thy word holds true.
I leave the blind world now; take thou its arm
And lead it on. Deal gently if it stumbles.
Remember this: light was restored to thee;
Be thou the eyes for Russia then. Look up,
For now thy sword will never blind thee more.
The aftermath of lightning flashes leaves
Earth darker than before them, therefore use
A better light than sword gleams give.
VLAD. 'Tis thou
Who'st led me to the better light. My sword
Was but a mirage of the sun,—
The glamor that eclipsed the true God's face.
But if its boastful flourishes enticed
Thee from thy grave, then may it boast again.
Go not; I love thee; I am jealous, too
Of th' other world that hath thee as its bride.
ROG. Farewell, I am the bride of light, who gave
Thee pain and helped thee conquer it; farewell!

(Rogneda's ghost slowly disappears.)

VLAD. Thou precious ghost-flower, thou shalt bloom within
The garden of mine eyes, tho thou dost fade
And sink into the earth. Thy pilgrimage
Hither and hence hath ceased; now shalt thou rest.

(Addressing the priests.)

Come, we must bring the people back.

(Vladimir, his guard and the priests go out at the left. Boris and Resulka enter at the right.)

RESUL. O I can run from thee no more, so here
I'll stand to prove my vows of no avail.
I'm like the cuckoo lingering upon
An oak branch when the wand'ring falcon's flown.
And why, dear Boris, why? my nest is torn;
Its feathers scattered. Where shall I rest now?

BORIS. (*Embracing her.*) Rest here, Resulka, for this breast tho scarred
By spear and arrow; bruised with brooding too
O'er thy strange love for me and not my God,
Is not too tattered to support thy head.
Make me thine idol, dear; Vladimir will
Not cast me forth. O bow to me and I
Shall bless and love thee ever!

RESUL. (*Letting her head fall on his breast.*) Then be thou
The nest whereon my weary head may rest.
Our gods are gone, but thou art here; save me!
The world is large and strange and so
I'll cling to just the little part thou art.

BORIS. Yes, cling to me and I'll protect thee ever.

RESUL. O Boris, be my god, my idol if thou wilt!
I can't resist thee more; thy God be mine!
O be my nest built on a solid oak,
And I'll embrace thee with my two wings thus.

(Puts her arms about him.)

I love thee so! And now my leaf-long lips
Are jealous of my arms. O let me kiss
Thee too and thus embrace thy lips with mine.

(She kisses him. Boris releases his hold.)

O Boris, spread thy bending arms o'er me,
Like young boughs striving with the passionate winds,
That I may be well wrapped and wound within
Their soft folds.

(He does so.)

Thou art mine again. Ah now
My breast feels warm with thine and deepest love
Anoints our sweet embrace with peace of heart.

BORIS. *(Spreading his arms about her without embracing her.)*
This arc of outspread arms contains a world
And as the round becomes complete, 'twill hold
Both Heav'n and Earth in its circumference.

(He embraces her. Elena, Yaroslafna and Ilya come in at the right. Boris and Resulka draw apart.)

ELENA. Resulka, Kaysan's dead and dead of grief.

RESUL. Of grief!

YAROS. The King chastised Perun and threw
Old Kaysan's idols down.

RESUL. Poor Kay!
He must have loved them better still than I,
But now I'm glad there're gone for I've
Another one Vladimir won't destroy.

BORIS. We'll miss his songs and him, but not his gods.
He's dead with pagan Russia; peace to him now.

(Aloysha enters hurriedly at the left.)

ALOY. (*Pointing to the left.*) See, see, the king comes with his priests; the people
Come with him for baptism; they've forsaken
Our gods and now believe in his. My wrath
That bears me to you 's like a hearse on which
I ride to death. O well it is poor Kay
Is dead! Where have you buried him? I'll lie
By 's side nor shall the king's sword conjure
My ghost above my tomb.

(Shouts heard.)

Hear, hear; they come!

BORIS. Praise God, they come; praise God, thine idols go!
Great Russia doth exhale their poisonous breath,
So stay with us, Aloysha; be baptised.

ALOY. Profaner of our gods, thou too hast fallen
Within the compass of his brandished sword,
That, by its evil-conjured gleams hath forced
My people to obey his will! O how
My festive heart's infected with this woe
And in the harvest hour is cut in twain
By that wide swathe Vladimir's scythe hath made!

RESUL. O good Aloysha, weep no more; our gods
Have not yet damned us, tho they are cast down.

ALOY. Thou too, Resulka? O friends, let me die!
ELENA. No; live with us and we will care for thee.
YAROS. Aloysha dear, despair not; all is well.
ALOY. Ye all may go Vladimir's way, not I!
Farewell! O how the great white world
Is blackened by the presence of this king!
Now shake thy falchion at me, Death; I will
Not run away nor hide in hauberk's steel!

(Noises heard of an approaching throng.)

Aloysha's dying and the huge earth seems
A crusher as Vladimir is!
O if my will were mighty as my grief,
'Twould conquer him, but it can not, so I
Must be the vanquished one.

(He goes out hurriedly at the right, thru the corn field.)

BORIS. He should have gone
Into the river where his idols are.
He's going backward; Russia moveth on.

(Enter, amid shouts, Vladimir, the two priests, and the populace, men and women of various ranks.)

VLAD. Hail to the conqueror who doth not use
His sword but gathers followers
By his persuasive words! O Christ in Heav'n,
I've found Thy way and will above my steel!
Thy law is fitter than my lances are,
And better e'en than arrows from the silk-strung bow.
Love penetrates the chain-mail and altho
The visored helmet's closed it strikes the ear!
Therefore, let all divest themselves of arms,
Made of most penetrable stuff and trust
This baptism to be protection now.

(All who have armor or weapons, throw them down, making a considerable noise. The day begins to darken.)

Give Up Your Gods

Hark, 'tis the devil groaning in his woe!
His implements are cast away as were
The idols of the pagan days, and now
On this first Christian evening of our land,
We'll celebrate a vesper rite and be
Baptised unto the Church of Christ. Let all
Move toward the river bank and none refuse.

1st Priest. (*Seizing a peasant's scythe.*)
First let me cut a cross upon the stream
To charm all evil spirits away.

(*He does so, then all except Vladimir, Boris and the two priests approach the water's edge, and as the priests read and chant the baptismal service, the people step into the water, some further than others, some even up to their necks,* then they come out again, and the priests continue the service a moment thereafter.*)

VLAD. All hail the Russian Christian land which hath
Remembered her Creator in her youthful days,
That she might not forget Him when she's old.
Then hail, thou Holy Russia, hail!
Be ever known as holy from this hour.
O Gracious God, whom we acknowledge here;
Whom we shall never cast away, look down
And bless these rites! Bind us to Thee
With arms of love, just as the silver fillet
Of stars entwines the crown of heaven's head!

(*The priests distribute crosses among the people, instructing them how to cross themselves, then show them the holy images, after which process, a number of them move to the left, desiring to return to the city.*)

VLAD. Wait, wait, my people, there's another rite

* As expressly stated in Nestor's Chronicle.

To be performed. My sword must be baptised;
Immersed in cleansing waters where ye've washed.

(All stop.)

Rogneda, thou wast right; there was another realm
That I should conquer, and it was myself,
My pain, my madness and my bloody wrath.
I'll flourish crosses and the crosiers now,
And let dull sloth eat off my sword's edge too,—
The sword once deemed a wand that could surpass
The rising sun's rays, northern lights and stem
A thousand thousand mutinies! But now
It shall not flourish more nor send its flames
Into Rogneda's quiet tomb, nor draw
Pale blood drops from her ashen brow!

(Holds his sword aloft.)

Thou garish weapon, light of younger days,
Thou wast my god whom I surrender too!
Thou idol unto whom I bowed, I am forgiven
Of blasphemy to Heav'n; thou too, must be.
Thus I baptise thee where my people were;
Wash off thy stains, subdue thy capering,
And show thee to thy conqueror, the Christ.

(He dips his sword into the river, then raises it aloft again.)

O thou hast waved o'er many a field and paced
The white world o'er, but now thy work is done;
This is thy judgment day; Time ends for thee.
Thy circumscription is the narrow sheath,
Wherein thy power's entombed! Farewell!

(He sheathes his sword and then turns to Boris.)

Boris, make Akim free then bid him come
To me.

(Boris departs at the left.)

1st Priest. Ah, thou art King indeed
A boon to captives; to heart broken ones,
A priest for Christ's sake. People, love your king,
The truest conqueror your land could have.

(*He puts a cross on Vladimir's breast.*)

Vlad. (*To the people.*) Good people, hear!
Would that the years to come
Beheld our rites and saw me sheathe my sword,
Whose dying gleams would warn our land and lessen
Our fratricidal strife! So, sheathe your blades
And love your God who blesses this broad land
Whose East, impatient for the rising sun,
Envies the passing orb, but with true love,
Speeds its departing chariot to the west;
Whose North, silvered with gleams of Heaven's sword,
Implores its southward flashes sow their fire
E'en to the Black Sea's shore; a land wherein God's love
Is shed with equity more true than man's
Unto his fellow man; a brotherly land
Whose rivers, rising in the north, gird up
Their liquid loins and migrate to the south,
Thus, with their silvery and sinuous arms
Most mother-like, they fold the great white world
In their embrace; a land too, whose soft winds
Rise in the south as rivers in the north,
And by their currents, God restores
Unto the north more than it gives away.
Our land inspires our unity! Behold
Its providential plans and harmonies
Which we must imitate for peace and love.

Act III

(Enter Boris, and Akim armed with his bow, at the left.)

Akim, thou art free. I have sheathed my sword;
Put by thy bow and arrows for my sake

AKIM. *(Seeing that the people expect him to do so.)*

Then take my weapons, Boris; if I'm free,
I'll do the bidding of the king.

(The people shout in approbation and clamor around Vladimir expressing their loyalty and crossing themselves to give proof of their sincerity.)

1st Man. Thou art our king indeed! Thy god is ours!

2nd Man. O hail Vladimir who protects us now!
Thou art the true king.

3rd Man. Vladimir, we love thee!

VLAD. You love not that Vladimir who once was;
Since coming to you, I've become a king.
I've put my helmet off in hopes
The halo of a holy spirit would be
The gleaming fillet 'round my head. My sword
Is like the comet that hath passed; my spears,
Like grain that's harvested; my hauberk's steel
Is less protection than the air. There was
A famine in my soul, a dearth of peace,
And too much woe; now riches fill it full,
And I'm at rest, and this, our Russian land,
Hath but one God, one King, one loving band.

THE END.

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